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**Negotiating constructions of success and failure: women in
mid-life and formations of subject, subjectivity and identity.**

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**Thesis submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in the discipline of
psychology**

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Abstract

This thesis explores constructions of success and failure for women in mid-life in Britain in the early 21st century. It takes a discursive approach to social psychology, understanding language as social action constituting subjects and subjectivity. Data from 20 interviews, including 4 conducted with women in pairs, supported by loosely structured questionnaires and a collection of photographs of women including celebrities and unknown women, were used to generate talk of selves and others. Key objects marked out as sites of success and failure included family; work-life balance; possession of psychological capitals of happiness, security, and decorum around material affluence; exercise of choice, evaluated as good or bad choice and implicated in responsible citizenship. Such sites were seen to be issues of interactional negotiation as analysis attended to ideological dilemmas and contested positions, to rhetorical negotiations of troubled and untroubled positions, such as dilemmas of adequacy and sufficiency for the passing subject.

Engaging with sociological narratives of individualisation and neoliberalism, this psychological study provided an empirical illustration of how these grand narratives appear in mundane talk in the context of constructions of success and failure, with implications for making sense of selves and others. Analysis showed more nuanced deployment of discursive resources than much previous literature suggests: talk was threaded with argumentation and contest.

The thesis also considered how discourse studies might take life history and personal order seriously. It presents an empirical analysis of personal order, extending this to interpersonal orders and habits of engagement accruing for subjects in ongoing relationships. It adds to debates on the nature of the psychosocial, with concepts from psychoanalytic psychosocial readings, such as imagination and projection, re-worked empirically as discursive productions embedded in shared resources for making sense of the world, deployments also rooted in sedimented personal history.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. The research aims

This thesis explores contemporary constructions of success and failure for women in mid-life in Britain in the first decade of the 21st century, and the implications for subjects, subjectivity, and claims to identity. The interest is in both negotiations of self and of others; in how subjects are worked up and marked out as successful or failing. It examines ideological dilemmas, the rhetorical negotiation of troubled and untroubled positions, and the figurations of personal and interpersonal orders for ‘subjectifying’ the self, and for subjectifying the other as ‘successful’ or ‘failing’.

This is an area encompassing some large debates in social psychology and social theory about the formations, maintenance and variability of contemporary subjects, and appropriate ways for investigating these. It is an area dominated in social theory by grand narratives of individualisation and neoliberalism. These debates have been active for fifteen years or more in sociology, but social psychology has been slow to engage with them. This thesis makes a contribution to this gap.

The thesis also contributes to contemporary dialogues between discursively led psychosocial psychologies favoured here and psychoanalytically inflected psychosocial psychologies. It argues for an understanding of the psychosocial which leaves aside the posited internally directed hidden worlds of the psychoanalytic, where the psyche is an unconscious governing property of the

individual, and instead, promotes an understanding of the psyche as thoroughly relationally, intersubjectively, and discursively organised.

The empirical foundations draw on interviews with a sample of 24 women aged between 33 and 59, conducted during the period October 2006 to September 2007. The epistemological foundations are that the language-in-use in these interviews is interested social action, not neutral representation. Language is understood to constitute worlds, subjects and semiotic histories and orders.

The analytic approach employed here synthesises an attention to the fine grained action that takes place in talk, and crucially also locates that talk within the broader ideological and historical environment, attentive to dilemmas, tensions and conflicts. In the process it works up a multilayered account of social, personal and interpersonal orders of meaning in relation to notions of successful and failing subjects, and successful and failing identities of self and other.

1.1.1. Individualisation and neoliberalism

Contemporary social theories of the Western subject are dominated by the grand narratives of neoliberal individualisation developed by Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992; see also Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; 2001). These ideas refer to the reflexive practices of the 'life project': making oneself into a particular kind of person, exercising particular choices, and building a personal capacity for self provision. The negotiation of identities of 'success' or 'failure' is argued to be a central task within the neoliberal, individualisation project (Clarke, 2005; Skeggs, 1997; 2004; Walkerdine, 2003).

These grand sociological narratives make up a debate to which social

psychology has been somewhat unresponsive. When psychology has attended to concepts of success and failure it has typically done so through studies of attribution theories (Försterling, 2001; Heider, 1958; Hewstone, 1983; Kelley, 1967; Ross, 1977; Weiner, 1985; Weiner, Frieze, Kukla, Reed, Rest and Rausenbaum, 1971); or as factors correlating with measures of ‘self-esteem’ (Brown and Dutton, 1995; Emler, 2001; McGregor and Elliott, 2005); or theorists’ ascriptions to fears – fear of failure and fear of success (Clance and Imes, 1978; Horner, 1969; Hyde and Kling, 2001; Jones and Berglas, 1978; Tresemer, 1976a; 1976b; Wrye, 2006); and with an occasional view to how individuals might define success and failure (Dyke and Murphy, 2006; Smulyan, 2004; Sturges, 1999). Mostly, ‘success’ and ‘failure’ have been treated as self-evident, objectifiable outcomes, determined in advance by the operational interests of the researcher. The approach has often been over-simplified, taken for granted, and individualistic.

However, both social psychology and social theory have rather overlooked the complex and nuanced social activity taking place when people take on constructs of success and failure. A small body of work is beginning to address this (see for example Locke, 2004, on sporting success; Smulyan, 2004, and Wagner and Wodak, 2006, on career success). Nevertheless the gap in the project remains vast.

The underpinning argument of the thesis is that while contemporary individualisation practices may coerce people into marking out particular accountable ways of being ‘successful subjects’, what passes as success is contested and shifting. This means people have opportunity and call to be

creative and flexible in the way they recruit and navigate mobile discourses of success and failure; working up moment by moment passing kinds of identity capitals.

For example, material possessions may be positioned as measures of success, and their absence as measures of (economic) failure; particular forms of employment may occupy hierarchical positions over others, and particular kinds of intimate relationships may be privileged over others, or indeed over none, and so on. However, these may also all be contested as to whether they are the right kinds of measures of success. And, whether their absence implies failing subjects. This space for contest makes alternative claims to success negotiable, such as claims to ‘psychological’ success via discourses of happiness for example, which can be used to outrank other constructions or re-fashion them. The thesis will illustrate this taking place in discursive practices.

But, these various claims to successes are not without severe constraints. For success to be claimed effectively, it must be done in such a way as to be persuasive, to be *recognised*, as success. What might be understood by these notions of ‘success’ and ‘failure’ is of course integral to the empirical ambitions of the thesis. However, within the social constructionist underpinnings for this thesis, positions of ‘success’ and ‘failure’ are imagined as provisional, shifting, relational states of interested stake, requiring ongoing management. This management is understood to carry risk, as concepts of success and failure are marked out as ethical projects; loaded with moral dilemmas and threats to identity and subjectivity (Locke, 2004; Skeggs, 2004; 2005; Walkerdine, 2003; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001). Both failure *and* success must be

managed in talk with care.

It is an aim of this thesis to explore the social action which takes place when speakers talk of success and failure. It will consider what these grand narratives of neoliberal individualisation look like lived out in discursive practices of subjectivity and identity making. The thesis examines some of the ideological dilemmas and trouble in relation to both failure and success, reproduced, re-worked, and lived out in the moment. The thesis also has something to say about how these social practices are taken up as if they are authentic, owned psychologies; and how they take on a character of personal, and interpersonal order in the patterns of use.

1.1.2. Invisible women

The ‘subjects’ in this thesis are women in mid-life. In psychology, Mary Gergen (1990: 477) has argued that ‘the woman at midlife has largely been overlooked by existing psychological accounts’ (1990:477) and where she is made visible, it is ‘highly circumscribed in focus’ – physical decline – and ‘disabling in its consequences’ (1990:480). This is in large part, she argues, because of the way many psychological accounts support oppressive ideological constraints on women. Where we do appear, we are often pathologised as beings in decay, as creatures of loss: loss of fecundity, opportunity, youth, beauty and so on (Banister, 2000; Chung, 2002; Degges-White, 2001; Gergen and Gergen, 2003).

There is of course a long line of critical feminist work explicating the systematic Othering of women (de Beauvoir, 1953; Greer, 1970; Skeggs, 1997; 2004; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989; and many others), where the practices of

gender and gendering are understood to produce a subject constructed as always already deficient, and deviant. These significant bodies of feminist scholarship suggest that women start the contemporary task of fashioning themselves as successful subjects from a culturally already given position of inadequacy. Moreover, this subject 'woman' is not simply presented and represented as deficient and deviant, but as one who must strive constantly to atone for that. Yet, as Skeggs citing Bartky (Skeggs, 1997:82) says, 'the demands of femininity are such that...virtually every woman is bound to fail, adding shame to her deficiency'.

What is more, the women in my study are women in mid-life, that is, women further tyrannised by a cultural drive to banish signs of that mid-life age (Gullette, 2004). Youth, Gullette argues, is a form of capital: if old age had similar capital, looking young at 40 would not be quite so well received. To be an aging woman, then, is to be deficient in a particularly buoyant form of social capital. In this framework 'the successful middle aged woman' is a virtually impossible position to inhabit. To be successful in mid-life means in effect to deny aspects of the embodied aging self and render these aspects of the self invisible (Bordo, 1993; Gullette, 2004). In short, this suggests that increasingly to be received as successful in middle age means not to appear to be in middle age.

While these critical accounts are philosophically and politically persuasive, there is a shortage of empirical analysis of how they are taken up by women themselves in mundane talk. So, one of the interests for this study lies in how language-in-use accounts from adult women, women in their 30s, 40s and 50s, might inform these characterisations of deficiency and deviancy, and 'failing'

subjects.

A focus on accounts of success and failure, framed in this way, is clearly not a neutral project. It carries a risk that simply by asking about these things, accounts of failing, of not being good-enough, the study may just be adding to the pathologisation of women already pointed to. It *could* work to reinforce the negative and oppressive characterisations just mentioned, and this will be something to pay critical attention to in analysis. It is not a reason, though, to avoid investigation. This topic is rooted in everyday business of being in the world (Pahl, 1995; Skeggs, 1997; 2004; Walkerdine, 2003). These are recurrent concerns, both in identity performance and the subjectivity of everyday lived lives.

A research aim framing the project then is to respond to the general invisibility in social psychology of women in mid-life, and to the routine pathologisation where we do appear (Gergen, 1990). However, the thesis also recognises from developing debates in concepts of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991; McCall, 2005; Wetherell, 2005a) that this is not a homogeneous group. There are multiple identities and subjectivities of this subject 'woman'. Therefore the specificity and constraints of the all white, all British sample of participants here needs to be flagged.

So, for this study of this particular sample of women loosely framed as in mid-life, the thesis explores if, and how, the grand narratives of the successful neoliberal self are taken up in the everyday practices of talk and meaning-making. It aims to understand something more about the discursive resources available to this group of women for giving meaning to 'success' and 'failure' for themselves

and other women; and indeed, what constitutes success and failure, and for whom. Combining all this, it considers the implications carried for inhabiting particular subject positions and performing particular identities of successful and/or failing subjects.

1.1.3. Conversations on the psychosocial

The final priority for the thesis is to join in current conversations on the ontology and epistemology of the ‘psychosocial’ subject. That is, debates on the nature of the psychosocial subject, and what can be known about that subject, and by what processes and methods. The women of this study are understood as postmodern, poststructural subjects. This is a Foucauldian reading of the subject: one constituted in practices and regimes of knowledge (Foucault, 1961; 1969; 1973; 1975; 1976; 1984; Rose, 1996; 1999). These are fragmented subjects immersed in reflexive consequential interactional discursive practices, where talk of success and failure are not neutral assessments of achievements and disappointments, but are conceived as practices which constitute people and in which people have a stake (Antaki, 1988; 1994; Billig, 1991; 1996; Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton and Radley, 1988; Davies and Harré, 1990; Gergen, 1994; 1999; Potter, 1996; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2001a; 2001b).

Subjects understood in this way are not simply users of language, but are subjects produced in language, in the ongoing technologies and practices through which the subject is knowable, both to itself and to others. This is a psychosocial subject – although this is a contested term (Andrews, Day Sclater, Squire and

Treacher, 2000; Frosh and Baraitser, 2008; Hollway, 2004; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000a; 2000b; 2005a; 2005b; Wetherell, 2005b).

The starting point in this thesis for working with the concept of the psychosocial is a fairly loose definition: that there is an *inseparable* relation between the subject, understanding, experience and the social realm. However, over recent years, the notion of the psychosocial has been somewhat captured by a psychoanalytically inflected account of the subject (Hollway, 2004). So, as part of this project I have a particular interest in exploring if this socially constructed subject needs to be understood in psychoanalytic terms (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn and Walkerdine, 1984; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000a; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001) or whether intriguing concepts from psychoanalysis, such as unconscious dynamics, repression, projection, identification and fantasy, can be re-worked discursively as social actions occurring in language-in-use, not in privately owned inner psyches (Billig, 1999a). This version of the subject is a thoroughly social, psycho-discursive subject (Wetherell, 2007; Wetherell and Edley, 1999), one which entirely elides any sense of Cartesian duality, of the split between an imagined thinking, feeling, experiencing 'I', and the social, material location of that 'I'. The thesis will point empirically to the 'doing' of discursively organised psychosocial subjectivities and identities and to methods for accessing that 'doing'.

1.2. Inside-outside the subject: (re)constructing the researcher

A reflexive address to the interests and investments of the researcher is an expected component of contemporary qualitative methodologies in psychology.

This follows a recognition that the positions and subjectivities of the researcher are integral to the unavoidably partial and situated conducts and products of the research (Taylor, 2001a). Thus, it has become the convention to present an account of the researcher's relationship to the research: to the topic, questions, assumptions, priorities, analytic paths and so on (Finlay and Gough, 2003; Lynch, 2000; Pels, 2000). On the face of it, this might be seen to be even more of a pressing requirement for this project given the similarities that might be drawn between my topic and my own situated concerns: I am a woman in mid-life, embedded in my own precarious 'life project' of building a new career. Locating myself in relation to my research seems irresistibly pertinent. However, I want to separate out a couple of issues: reflexivity as a profitable interrogatory tool to be used throughout the research process; and reflexive positioning as a versioned, public, autobiographical, invested, account.

On the first of these, I am committed to the principle and practice of reflexive interrogation of the trajectories of the research via questions about my own interests, investments, concerns, anxieties, assumptions and so on. However, I am more cautious and pessimistic about the second; the function of my own 'autobiographical' account. There are a number of problems with the processes and claims of such a reconstructed account.

Almack and Churchill (2007:37) point out that as researchers 'we do not have the benefits of anonymity provided to research respondents, [and this] raises salient questions about what we might want to reveal or conceal'. Self-presentation carries issues of risk. To expose oneself reflexively, and indeed those others who may people our autobiographical accounts either directly or by

implication, to critical public scrutiny is a risk. To do so may be taken as evidence for a 'well-balanced psyche', or alternatively, simply 'foolhardiness' (Ribbens McCarthy, 2007:142). To be too free with one's narrative risks falling into a 'vortex of narcissism, pretentiousness, or infinite regress' (Finlay and Gough, 2003:xi).

Demands of the academy and the genre mean that to tell oneself as a reflexive researcher needs to be a balanced, carefully managed identity project in its own right. Whatever the intent, these reflexive autobiographical accounts are unavoidably their own acts of repression: any one account silences other possible accounts, 'concealing more than they reveal' (Billig 1999a:7). As some features are included other possibilities are excluded – hence my pessimism about reflecting on my own position. Nevertheless, the arguments for some form of self location are compelling and need to be treated with respect, albeit doubt.

I am a woman in mid-life, studying the discourses of women in mid-life. I am exploring other women's constructions of success and failure along with complex moral constructions of identities of the self and others; and I am doing this at the same time as I am undertaking my own life project. This is a project to reconfigure myself from a former position of mainly unfulfilling, tenuous, low paid, sometimes piecemeal, contract work in voluntary or not-for-profit organisations; to a successful academic 'subject' through the practices of doctoral candidacy and subsequent employment. I am then a subject in immediate, intimate, relations with notions of successes and failures; a subject 'inside' my subject of study.

Undoubtedly though, I have a different agenda to the women who most

generously took part in this study. Inevitably I appropriate their words to my service. Therefore I am not precisely ‘one of them’: my multiple positions and intersubjectivities flow differently throughout the project. I am relationally distributed, being both a subject *inside* my subject; and simultaneously *outside* of my subjects.

The inevitable personal indexicality of the topic was not my original, ‘conscious’, motivation. Rather, I was intrigued by the apparent skill some women are able to demonstrate in working up (very well) passing identities with one set of discursive resources; when other women, in apparently similar circumstances, appeared to struggle to recruit resources for equivalently passing accounts. Not surprisingly though, despite my initial naivety, I am of course now both positioning my research and its outcomes, and positioned by them.

As a white, British, working class woman, with a shifting career trajectory, now pursuing a career in higher education, I feel myself precariously positioned (Almack and Churchill, 2007:43). This positioning is not only by my own semiotic order, self-doubts and anxieties, or the remembered and imagined voices of the past, but also by the strenuous reminders from respected scholars (some also self-categorised as working class) that *as* a working class woman I will experience myself as not quite good enough (Skeggs, 1997; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001), as always in range of failure. I confess this has resonance, no more so than now.

Moreover, as I have immersed myself in the discourses and ideologies of my analysis many other facets of my life have been brought into relational relief. What have my different imaginings of success been, my imaginings of my failures

(past and future)? In each relationship, in each job, in the conducts of my life, what have been my understandings of myself as a successful or failing subject? Have I, do I, will I pass? These questions locate me directly within the topic of my subject. I am acutely aware that such questions of success and failure, whether asked publicly or privately, can be painfully loaded. This is precisely a reason why such notions matter as a subject of research scrutiny.

Etherington (2004:16) suggests that transparency and reflexivity in research may be gendered in some way, a facet, she claims, of ‘women’s ways of knowing’. This is not an argument I find persuasive, but nevertheless, it takes on something of a direct challenge. If I am to locate myself as a ‘successful’ *female* researcher, I am doubly urged to open up my life to scrutiny wherever it may be connected in some way with my subject of study. However, given my subject of study, success and failure, as it is worked up by women often much like me, but translated in whatever direction the participants in this study lead, it is hard to imagine what fears, anxieties, hopes and desires, materialities and practicalities I might conceive which are *not* connectable to my research in some way. I have to draw the line somewhere. I choose to draw it early, but flexibly: I will make reference to my own connected positions at different points in my analysis – but this will be with a light touch.

1.3. An overview of the thesis

Throughout the thesis I will be developing a social psychology account of constructions of success and failure for women in mid-life, embedded in larger discourses of individualisation and neoliberalism. However, this is a thesis

attentive to the dialogic, to nuance, flexibility and variability. The goal is to contribute substantive material from an often overlooked population to the neglected debates around these grand narratives of social theory and to understand something of the positions which may be inhabited, the contests which may be negotiated. An additional goal rests on making an empirical contribution to discussions of the ontology and epistemology of the psychosocial subject.

In **Chapter 2** I review some of the traditions in psychology for examining notions of success and failure. Given the vast scope of the field this is not a comprehensive review of all these literatures on success and failure. Instead, the focus is on outlining the different ways success and failure have been researched, and the different types of assumptions and epistemologies which underpin them. In particular, I consider attribution theories - how people account for success and failure, important because it has such a vast history in the psychology of success and failure; and also literatures on the emotional associations of success and failure, particularly supposed fearfulness and impacts on self esteem. I summarise the things most commonly marked out as sites and objects of success and failure, most typical of which is career success and I examine some recent studies here.

Throughout, I present a critique which argues that following the turn to language in the 1980s a new way of approaching social psychology became a compelling paradigm shift for many scholars and presented a devastating critique for the available psychologies of success and failure. In particular, I will be presenting the now familiar argument that conventional approaches to the psychology of success and failure overlook the social actions, functions, and accomplishments at stake for subjects as they negotiate particular situated

subjectivities and take up particular identities around constructs of success and failure.

In **Chapter 3** I outline this paradigm shift by drawing on post-structuralist readings of the subject. I gather together the central intellectual resources which underpin the thesis and explain why I favour this framework for thinking. This combines Foucauldian theories of subjectification, power and technology, fleshed out with an account of the psy complex, and the grand sociological narratives of neoliberal meritocratic individualisation. I also present an account of language as dialogic, elaborated through concepts of ideological (re)productions, positioning theories and psycho-discursive concepts of trouble, and imaginary positions worked up in discourse studies in social psychology. This third chapter also considers the explanatory potential of a psychoanalytically informed psychosocial theory, particularly as it might contribute theories of emotion, repression, projection, investment, and so on. However, I contest some of the crucial assumptions and methods of psychoanalysis and establish my own position firmly located within a dynamic dialogic and reflexive psycho-discursive psychosocial framework.

The argument flowing through the account so far is that to understand the practices and implications of constructing identities of success and failure there is an inescapable need to understand the subject as complex, multiple, situated, and contingent. In the final block of this chapter I address some of the specificities of these complications by exploring ideas of location and intersectionality through configurations of gender, age, and class.

Chapter 4 explains the methods used. These are underpinned by the

central notion of language as social action. I consider different approaches within discourse studies in social psychology, and explain why I favour a synthesis of micro and macro analyses of interview data. I discuss the rationale for using open-ended, loosely structured interviews to generate data. Choosing this loose structure reflects my desire to examine those objects participants would mark out as successes or failures, rather than directing their actions around any *a priori* assumptions of success and failure I might make. The interviews also offered a setting for working up accountable identities. Here, sixteen of twenty interviews were conducted one to one, but four interviews were conducted in pairs. The two formats presented participants with very different interactional, relational accounting tasks. Interviews also utilised photographic images of other women, some celebrities, some unknown. I explain my purpose in this as a means of encouraging and supporting a focus on ‘actual’ others in addition to accounts of the self. I explain my sampling methods and my decision to amend my sampling plan part way through data collection as renewed ethical concerns arose for me. I also explain the transformation of interview material into data, and the recursive processes of transcription and analysis, and the contribution of field notes to analysis.

In Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 I present my empirical findings. In the first of these, **Chapter 5**, I begin by illustrating the kinds of talk the project has generated and indicate some of the interests to be pulled out as analysis proceeds, for example the particular kinds of discursive resources available, and dilemmas of positioning and accountability participants implement in the production of individualised, biographical, and psychologised subjects. I caution against any

overly simplistic division of success and failure into uncomplicated binaries, suggesting something much more flexible and nuanced as participants translate success and failure into a range of alternative forms, such as ‘things that are important’, and ‘what makes me happy’. The core of the chapter, though, attends to discourses of family. This is one of the central sites worked up by speakers as a marker for successes and failures. Children and relationships are routinely produced as primary components of claims to successful identities for the speakers here. However, there are also conflicting demands generated around mothering and career. All together, this generates a powerful normative order in prioritising family, but one that is also a precarious and diminished position for women inhabiting dialogic dilemmas. I illustrate some of the discursive strategies available for navigating a route through these tensions, particularly the practice of calling up multiple, contrasting, subject positions.

In **chapter 6**, I turn attention to the resources for constructing successful psychologised and agentic selves as participants negotiated the right kinds of psychological capitals. This includes a decorum about displays of wealth, and a privileging of security, happiness, and exercising choice. Material wealth is constructed and orientated to as a troubled component of claims to being a successful self. It is a position which appears to be constrained by normative expectations of modesty. This intersects in challenging ways for speakers invited to work up identities of success in a climate that emphasises so greatly the successful production of selves, but which requires modesty in self presentation.

A particularly useful solution to the dilemma of negotiating warrantable, legitimate, and nuanced notions of success and failure appears in the working up

of two ‘psychologised’ sites of success - happiness and choice. Both constitute particular claims to success; and both are strategic resources for rejecting implications of failure. Choice however, is worked up by speakers in a highly versatile way. Speakers are in critical, nuanced debate with concepts of choice, questioning the tensions and contests ‘choice’ brings; and the demands of being a ‘choosing’ subject. Moreover, talk of choices made invokes criteria for marking out good choice and bad choice, the responsible and irresponsible, and with it good subjects and bad subjects.

In **Chapter 7** I turn attention to the construction of imaginary others, using an exploration of the body as a site of moral tensions and imagined psychologies. Data for the chapter came from discussions of photographs of other women, some celebrities, some unknown. This created a rich opportunity for a multi-layered analysis of social and personal orders in which speakers constructed other women. I examine the way the practice of imagining others, constructing particular kinds of psychological, emotional states, and so on, is a practice built into the shared discursive resources available for making sense of selves and others. The way in which different women are constructed in terms of living out successful or failing lives suggests a telling process of classification according to moralised hierarchies of social capital; who is marked out as valued, and who is not.

I also argue though that the particular organisation these discursive imaginings of others takes, is not simply a matter of socially shared discourses, but is also deeply rooted in personal history and personal order: particular discursive resources settle into particular habits of meaning-making drawing on a sediment of salient resources. To illustrate, I weave an analysis of one

participant's talk of beauty, family and sacrifice in relation to others, with an analysis of those concepts played out in relation to her talk of herself, and her own biography as a mother and business women in the beauty industry. I use this analysis of personal order to address a critique from psychoanalytic psychosocial psychology that queries the potential for a discursively led social psychology to take biography and life history seriously. I demonstrate empirically through the multilayered analyses of talk here that a discursively led psychology is indeed able to do precisely that.

Chapter 8 adds to this debate with an illustration of both personal *and* interpersonal order through an examination of one interview between two sisters working up connected and contested accounts of successful and failing identities. I consider some of the literatures on sibling relationships which might inform analysis before demonstrating a recurring pattern both in the biographical events the sisters narrate and in unfolding sequences of that narration. This is a routine and repeated 'habit of engagement', an interpersonal order by which the speakers construct and enact a particular pattern of taking up/taking over each other's subject positions and narrative capitals. I also work up the notion of recognition and misrecognition, both as it occupies the sisters' talk, and as it offers explanatory possibilities as a quality of untroubled and troubled positions.

Finally, in **Chapter 9** I summarise my thesis and present my conclusions, showing the contributions to knowledge this study makes and the potential areas for further research.

Appendices follow the final chapter, including recruitment and sample details, copies of the photographic images used and details of transcription

notation. **References** are at the end.

Chapter 2. Reviewing psychologies of success and failure

2.1. A rationale for selecting literatures

There is no one simple ‘psychology of success and failure’. Previous study has approached conceptualisations of success and failure in a variety of ways and this chapter explores some of those ways as potential resources for addressing the research questions outlined in chapter 1. However, the breadth and depth of the literature is vast and a pragmatic way of rationalising the material of choice is needed.

Broadly, literatures on success and failure might be roughly divided into four overlapping themes: how people *account* for it (attribution theory); how to *achieve* it (for example, motivation theories); what success and failure *feels* like (particularly its fearfulness and its impact on self esteem); and to a lesser extent, what it is to *be* a successful person (captured mainly by humanistic psychologies attending to personal growth, fulfilment and self-actualisation). As a consequence of both scale and focus it is not practical to take a detailed literature review of all of these empirical and theoretical sites, nor is it sensible to focus in close detail on just one leaving other relevant literatures untouched. Instead, I will be outlining some key concepts, assumptions and epistemologies from these broad areas in order to set out interlocutors for the arguments which run through this thesis.

I will be suggesting the different fields have one particular point in common which is of direct importance for this project. Typically, the literatures

covered here tend to converge around the idea that when people (participants and analysts) are talking about ‘success’ and ‘failure’, there is generally some trouble to be navigated. In this sense, the literatures make a valuable contribution to the study here, pointing to what might be troublesome about success and failure and suggesting some fruitful lines of exploration. I will be illustrating this shortly. However, I will also be arguing that the approaches to the person, the methodologies and epistemologies of the psychologies in which these literatures are embedded, are problematic. They generate resources which, while offering some valuable indicators of phenomena, are often only of limited use for the questions asked in this study about social actions constituted in discourses of success and failure, and implications for ideological tensions and discourses of identity. Existing literature leaves much unanswered in this regard. I will be arguing that to understand how notions of success and failure are material to participants’ lived-lives as situated meaning-makers, a different concept of the person is needed to those conventionally drawn on, and in particular, a different concept of language, and language-in-use, as constitutive social action.

Section 2.2 is organised around attribution theory, important because it has such a vast history in psychology and relevant here for its attention to the kinds of causal accounts people draw on when they talk about success and failure. In 2.3 I turn to literatures on the emotional associations of success and failure, with particular attention to fear and self-esteem. In 2.4. I use the literatures outlined to summarise those things which most commonly get marked out as sites and objects of success and failure, with particular attention to the most common amongst these, career, and I present a critique of some recent studies. In section 2.5 I

summarise my conclusions for the chapter.

2.2. Attribution studies

Attribution theory has a vast history in psychology (Antaki, 1994; Edwards, 1997; Edwards and Potter, 1992; Försterling, 2001; Heider, 1958; Hewstone, 1983; Kelley, 1967; Ross, 1977; Weiner, 1985; Weiner, *et al.*, 1971).

Attribution has typically been approached as the ‘scientific study of naïve theories and commonsense explanations’ (Försterling, 2001:xi). It is primarily, although not exclusively, concerned with lay accounts for the causes of one’s own and other people’s behaviours, and for outcomes of those behaviours. In particular, explanations for the causes of ‘successes’ and ‘failures’ have been part of the common stock in attribution theory. Examination of accountings for success and failure extend across a wide range of topics, such as career achievements (Schlosser, 2001), academic success (Cortez-Suarez and Sandiford, 2008), sporting success (Locke, 2004; Stoeber and Becker, 2007), health (Schoeneman and Curry, 1990), relationships (Bradbury and Fincham, 1990; Houts and Horne, 2008; Stander, Hsiung, and MacDermaid, 2001), and so on.

Related to this is the study of attributional theory, that is, the study of the psychological outcomes from making attributions. This asks questions about the implications of causal attributions, for example the relationships between attributions for failure and motivations to try again (Shields, Brawley and Lindover, 2005) or to adopt avoidant behaviours (Brown and Dutton, 1995); or the implications for attributing ‘success’ to ‘luck’ say, rather than to ability for example (Försterling, Preikschas, and Agthe, 2007).

Moreover, attribution has been one of the most vital sites where epistemologies have been fought out and was one of the first areas where discourse studies in social psychology established clear territory (Antaki, 1994; Edwards, 1997; Edwards and Potter, 1992).

Attribution theory began with the conceptualisation of people as lay scientists, naturally engaged in private causal explanations of events (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1967). A fundamental assumption has been that attribution operates as a rational, systematic and consistent *underlying* process: a process ‘behind’ the words used. Investigation proceeds in order to arrive at a set of ‘higher order relations of attributions’ (Weiner, 1985: 570), that is, the systematised cognitive framework by which people draw conclusions about causes of events. This is an enormous field spanning more than five decades. Försterling (2001) and Hewstone (1989) provide valuable introductions, and Antaki (1994), Edwards (1997) and Edwards and Potter (1992), invaluable critiques which go on to completely reframe ‘attributions’ as social practice rather than cognitive practice. These distinctions are discussed below but first some additional detail on attribution theory.

The history of attribution research commonly begins with Heider (1958) although some limited attempts have been made to recognise the writings of Gustav Ichheiser from the late 1920s, 1930s and 1940s (Rudmin, Trimpop, Kryl, and Boski, 1987). Both Heider and Ichheiser were working on processes of perception and attribution over a similar period of time but in independent developments: Heider working within a cognitive model; Ichheiser within a phenomenological and discursively inflected model attentive to talk as socially

situated action (Rudmin *et al.*, 1987). However, Ichheiser's contribution to understanding the social nature of people's expressions has been given scant attention. Rudmin *et al.* suggest that while Heider is rightly regarded as the father of attributional psychology, Ichheiser 'might be considered a long lost 'rich uncle' waiting to be discovered and welcomed home' (Rudmin *et al.*, 1987:175). Currently, it remains the case that little of Ichheiser's work is available in English translation, he is still only rarely cited, and Heider's cognitivist approach continues to be the common starting point for introductions to attribution theory.

Heider's proposition was that lay explanations are a cognitive process of categorisation where the underpinning judgement is whether 'cause' is internal to the person, or external, located in the environment or situation (Heider, 1958). Rotter (1966, cited in Weiner, 1985) subsequently termed this 'the locus of control'.

Then Weiner *et al.* (1971) argued an additional dimension was indicated, stability. For example, in their studies of student attributions for success and failure, Weiner *et al.* noted four dominant factors said to have an affect on outcomes: 'ability', 'effort', 'task difficulty', and 'luck'. Ability and effort could be accounted for as internal attributes, task difficulty and luck as external. However, Weiner *et al.* argued some of these attributes might fluctuate, hence the need for stability as an organising dimension. Initial propositions suggested that ability was held to be internal and stable; effort was internal and unstable; task difficulty was categorised as external and stable; and luck was external and unstable.

Weiner (1985) later suggested this two dimensional attributional matrix

still over-simplified processes in part because of the ambiguity of terms. Effort, which had been classed as occasioned and therefore unstable, could instead be understood as a stable trait of an industrious person. Ability could be interpreted as stable in terms of a person's aptitude, but unstable in that learning and forgetting occur, and so on. Ambiguity in constructs has been picked up elsewhere. For example, Krantz and Rude (1984, cited in Antaki, 1994) showed low levels of agreement amongst participants on whether luck was an external or internal quality, or a stable or unstable quality, clearly indicating people use constructs in quite different ways. Attempts have been made to reconcile these observations by exploring interactions between these factors with additional dimensions such as controllability, intentionality and responsibility (Weiner, 1985).

Complexity was also recognised in other ways which also started to undermine the way attributions have been theorised. Many studies have reported systematic 'biases' in the attributions people make. The 'fundamental attribution error' (FAE) named by Ross (1977) is a classic study in the field. It refers to a tendency speakers display for attributing others' behaviours to internal dispositions rather than to external situational factors.

Observing such systematic biases raises questions about the origins of attribution biases: whether they are cognitive in origin, in that they are a product of perceptual biases in information processing systems; or motivational, in that they arise out of the needs of the person doing the attributing, to preserve self-esteem, perhaps; or whether they are an emergent product of some other circumstance. For example, a bias related to the FAE is the actor-observer effect

(Jones and Nisbett, 1972) which also describes the tendency to attribute others' behaviours to internal dispositions, but our *own* to situational factors. But, further studies indicate the pattern is more complicated than this. In attributions for success and failure, an allegedly self serving bias has been noted for attributing our *successes* to internal dispositions and our *failures* to external situational factors (Weary Bradley, 1978). Stevens and Jones (1976, cited in Byford, 2002) suggest this might operate as a defensive measure to protect self esteem: it allows the claim that our successes are due to the kinds of people we are; but that our failures are due to other factors outside of our own dispositions.

Other studies have concentrated on those circumstances where participants *do* make internal attributions for failures but do so in a way that manages potential threats to self esteem. For example, Schoeneman and Curry (1990) posit a 'personal changeability' factor in people's attributions. This means participants manage the attributional threat of failure by utilising Weiner's *stability* factor. People may attribute their failure to internal causes, but to internal causes that are not fixed dispositions, but are open to change. Attribution to 'effort' is an example. In this way, 'people take credit for failure as well as success, but in a way that makes failure reversible and subject to personal control' (Schoeneman and Curry, 1990:422-3).

Shields *et al.* (2005) use similar logic to account for another paradox in their study of participants' perceptions of success and failure in adherence to exercise programmes. This was, quite typically, a questionnaire based study using rating scales. Therefore, as with the other studies cited so far, it was not able to capture the diversity in talk *as-it-happens* but instead worked with coded

transformations of that talk. Questionnaires were administered in weeks one and seven of a twelve week exercise programme. Participants were asked if they considered themselves (on previous experience) to be successful adherents of exercise programmes according to scales of efficacy, affect, perceived exertion, and attributions. This retrospective data was compared with actual adherence and attributions in the current exercise programme. Some participants who adhered to the programme indicated on scale measures that they did *not* think of themselves as successful adherents to exercise. Some who dropped out said they *did* consider themselves to be successful adherents. Those who dropped out but saw themselves as generally successful adherents were more likely to attribute locus of control for their current failure internally. In other words, those who failed to adhere to this programme but considered themselves to be successful adherents to exercise in general, saw their failures *and* their past and future successes as within their control. Shields *et al.* (2005) interpret these qualities as self-enhancing, optimistic self-efficacy beliefs, albeit distorted, which are adaptive for encouraging perseverance. Consequently they suggest these features are predictive socio-cognitive characteristics for participants' likelihood of taking up future exercise programmes.

The proposition that attributional styles are adaptive has been picked up by Försterling *et al.* (2007) from the perspective of evolutionary psychology. Försterling and colleagues were responding to earlier work which noted sex differences in attributions, particularly findings that women and men are more likely to attribute women's successes to luck or effort; more likely to attribute men's successes to ability; and women's failures are more likely than men's to be

attributed to lack of ability (for example, Deaux and Emswiller, 1974, cited in Försterling *et al.*, 2007). However, they also noted ‘there was nothing sexual in research on sex differences in causal attributions’ (2007:776), by which they mean no attention to potential reproductive advantages in evolutionary terms. Their own study found same-sex attributions changed according to whether the stimulus person was considered attractive or unattractive. Women attributed successes of attractive women and unattractive men to luck more than ability; and successes of attractive men and unattractive women to ability more than luck. Men similarly made more luck attributions for attractive men and unattractive women; and more ability attributions for unattractive men and attractive women. Försterling *et al.* (2007) interpret this via an evolutionary adaptivity account suggesting women and men derogate attractive competitors for mates, and glorify desirable mates. What is missing from their analysis however, is any assessment of what might be taken for granted in talk of ‘luck’ or ‘ability’ and what might be being constructed in the deployment of these particular terms in any particular ideological or material context.

The complex and conflicting observations in attribution studies fuel a range of debates and critical commentary. On the one hand, evidence of systematic biases argues against Heider’s (1958) underpinning notion of people as naïve scientists engaged in rational, logical, information-processing. On the other, diversity and changeability in the causal factors nominated also raises questions about how generalisable ‘systematic’ biases might actually be when they operate so differently in different circumstances. This is not to suggest there are no ‘patterns’ in lay attribution talk. What it does point to though, are questions about

the nature of those patterns and the contingent contexts in which they occur.

These critical questions come from several routes. One was the broad ranging call for greater ecological validity in psychological research in general (Gergen, 1973). This developed momentum in the 1970s and saw increasing recommendations for moving studies of social psychology out of the laboratory and away from reductionist, individualist, positivist assumptions. The argument gained further momentum from the development of social constructionist theories (Gergen, 1973) and poststructuralism (Henriques *et al.*, 1984).

A second critique comes from increasingly sophisticated understandings of the nature of language and the way speakers use language to accomplish situated social actions (Antaki, 1988; Austin, 1962; Billig, 1996; Billig *et al.* 1988; Edwards, 1997; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 1998). Austin's (1962) speech act theory developed the notion of language as performative: stating, blaming, naming and so on are all actions constituting certain sorts of people, selves, relationships, events and other objects. Also, those actions change according to the illocutionary force of a statement – the same three words, such as 'open the window' may be many different actions – such as an order, a request, a question. Moreover, these are actions in which people have a stake (Potter, 1996). In effect, when people do things with language, language does things with people. A pivotal moment in the discursive turn in psychology came with the publication of Potter and Wetherell's (1987) blueprint for a discursive social psychology. This was a transformational text which underpinned the development of discourse studies in contemporary psychology and paved the way for a rich and varied range of analytic approaches and epistemological and ontological arguments (Antaki,

1988; Billig, 1991, 1996; *et al.*, 1988; Edwards and Potter, 1992; Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998; Potter, 1996; Potter and Wetherell, 1992; van den Berg, Wetherell, and Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2003).

Both the call for greater ecological validity, and the more sophisticated theory of language as social action, have contributed to a sustained critique of the methodologies and assumptions of much attribution research. Classic experimental attribution research is intensely vulnerable to these critiques (Antaki, 1988; 1994; Hewstone, 1989; Moscovici and Hewstone, 1983). Firstly, experimental methods typically make use of vignettes, which are problematic for several reasons. Vignettes have been shown to be susceptible to minor alterations in experimental variables. This suggests findings are unlikely to hold in the more fluid conditions of life outside the experiment (Byford, 2002). In addition, talk of cause is treated as a separate event to the description of the thing being accounted for. Instead, attributions are *in practice* inherent in the descriptions given; so the way people talk about the world contains within it ‘causes’, be that luck, personal qualities, or some other ‘factor’ (Edwards and Potter, 1992). These descriptions, including the attributions they contain are traditional, shared, ‘historically-situated explanatory discourse, rather than ... an outcome of a universal cognitive process’ (Byford, 2002:64).

As Byford notes, there are different ways of understanding these explanatory discourses. In Moscovici’s terms they are ‘social representations’, the collection of ideas, beliefs, and values which *pre-exist* the moment of deployment and the object of reference, and which act as a shared communicative code people use to orientate themselves to, and master their social world

(Moscovici, 1976, cited in Moscovici, 2000). Social representations theory assumes shared understandings of pre-existing, already defined objects such as groups and categories of people, which speakers draw upon to conduct themselves.

In contrast to social representations theory, Potter and Wetherell (1987) drew on work by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984, cited in Potter and Wetherell, 1987) to suggest a similar focus on socially shared meanings, but suggesting a much more mobile pattern of deployment. They understand these explanatory discourses as ‘interpretative repertoires’: groupings of terms, metaphors and tropes used to characterise and evaluate events. For Wetherell and Potter (1992) the contents of interpretative repertoires are the building blocks by which language accomplishes social action. They are more variably available to social actors across groups who construct and reconstruct groups, categories, and objects *in the moments* of interactional discursive deployments (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). The main point here though is that examining attribution out of its everyday site of use and placing it within the constraints of experimentally controlled variables pushes out of sight these ‘real life’ features of attribution as shared explanatory resources that ‘come with’ the description of the thing itself. This is not to say that ‘talk’ in the laboratory is divested of its social nature and its shared communicative practices. Talk *is* always social within this framework. What it means is that the *mundane, dialogic, interactional* sociality of attribution talk is distorted and obscured by the practices of experimental design. These practices presuppose attributions are cognitive ‘objects’ which can sensibly be decontextualised from everyday interactional sites, isolated, coded on

to matrices and statistically analysed for group differences, without losing the ontological nature of talk as situated social action. Language is more mobile, variable, contingent and more reflexively invested, than reductionist examinations by ‘controlled variables’ allows for (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Potter 1996). Consequently, when people talk of successes and failures, their attributions do much *more* than attribute cause (Antaki, 1988; 1994).

The recognition that language in its everyday use is much ‘messier’ than the ‘tidied up’ version of the laboratory allows, led to a range of calls to embed studies of attribution – along with other objects of study – in more ecologically valid methodologies. Nevertheless, there continues to be a split between the desire for a universal model of attribution talk, a ‘top down’ approach to what people do, and a willingness to work ‘bottom up’, beginning with what people actually do when they do attribution in talk, in all its everyday variability. The top down approach is exemplified by Hilton (1990) who rightly called for an understanding of attribution as an event situated in conversational exchange. However, as a model of attribution-in-use, Hilton’s version is essentially flawed. Hilton called specifically for a Gricean understanding of conversation. (Grice, 1975, cited in Hilton, 1990). This invokes the presupposition that conversation is governed by the principle of co-operation, according to maxims of quality, quantity, relevance and manner. In Gricean terms, this means communicative conversational exchanges must not include what is known to be false, or unsupported by evidence; utterances must carry sufficient information; utterances must pertain to the manifest topic; utterances must be delivered in a coherent and sensible way.

However, this formula clearly belies much conversation as it *actually* happens (Antaki, 1994; Edwards and Potter, 1992). People *are* known to lie, to mislead, to lose track, to change the subject, to be obscure, to be mistaken. The Gricean algorithmic way of framing what is happening when people do causal accounting for successes and failures takes conversation ‘as it happens’, which yes, is often cooperative, and *replaces* it with an abstract logic of an ‘idealized cognitive package’ (Antaki, 1994:31). More than that, though, it does not take into account the range of social actions, blaming, excusing, justifying, claiming agency, and so on, which people engage in when they are doing ‘attributing’ (Antaki, 1988; 1994; Billig, 1991; 1996; Edwards and Potter, 1992; 1993; Locke, 2004).

The notion that language, and therefore attribution, is social action is grounded in constructionist arguments (Gergen, 1999). Language constructs versioned worlds and accomplishes interested social action. Its use is situated, contingent, flexible, fluid and rhetorical (Antaki, 1988; Billig, 1991; 1996; Billig *et al.*, 1988; Potter, 1996; Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2001a; 2001b). Within this framework, the question becomes not the somewhat strait-jacketed, *to what do people attribute successes and failures?* but rather, *what social actions are performed when people account for successes and failures?* Locke’s (2004) discursive psychology study of attributions for success and failure in sports performances demonstrates this well. She argues talk of success is ‘softened’ via performances of modesty. Attributing success to ‘luck’, for example, works to dilute suggestions of personal agency and credit. Failure may also be discursively mitigated, and blame avoided or reduced, by claiming limited agency over aspects

of the performance. Locke provides a convincing micro-analytic reading of the social action taking place in the talk she analyses. She makes the important point that what would traditionally be interpreted as attribution is shown to be a resource for managing accountability. What is left unaddressed though, is an analysis as to *why* claims to success should be softened by modesty; *why* failures demand accountability management. What is it about these particular constructs in this particular site that means success and failure may be taken for granted as self-evidently positive or negative, self-evidently consequential and reflecting back on speakers in particular ways? What we get in Locke's account are hints that success as well as failure are both sites of potential trouble. But how widespread are these troubles? What is the diversity and variability in trouble as it materialises in different deployments of success and failure, in different interactional contexts, working with different ideological dilemmas? I discuss these concepts of trouble and dilemma in more detail in chapter 3; and address answers empirically in chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8.

To summarise so far, attributions for success and failure make up a substantial part of a vast body of work which draws attention to important common, everyday, linguistic practices for making sense of the world and people's behaviours in it. I have presented samples of that work to give a flavour of the main themes and interests. However, there are a range of damaging critiques. Those aimed at the theory of the person as an information-processor, standing back from the world to observe and comment upon it; and those aimed at the theory of language as a neutral reflection of internal cognitions, both raise serious questions about how useful conventional approaches to attribution might

be for this study. Neither adequately reflect the *social* nature of language in use. The theory of language which underpins these types of attribution studies means they offer little as either a descriptive or an explanatory resource for understanding what people are doing when they make attributions for success and failure. In contrast, attribution studies influenced by the discursive turn have re-framed the processes of attribution as social actions and it is this understanding I want to carry forward in the thesis, but with a more critical questioning of diversity and variability, and with particular attention on success and failure as sites of discursive trouble.

2.3. Success, failure, and emotion

This section turns to literatures on some of the emotional associates of success and failure. These have been important in the way they attend to consequences for lived life experience when people take up success and failure as emotionally laden concepts. Laird (2007) suggests most emotion theory distinguishes between ‘prototypical emotions’, such as fear, and ‘feelings’, such as self-esteem. For the purposes of this discussion, I do not do that. Instead I group, albeit roughly, a set of literatures on fear and self-esteem. I begin in section 2.3.1 with women’s fear of success, drawing on two particular bodies of work. The first is rooted in Matina Horner’s projective cue study of ‘women of ability’, the second introduces a revival of psychoanalytically informed fear of success literatures which can be traced back to Karen Horney. In 2.3.2 I turn to fear of failure, with particular reference to ‘the impostor phenomenon’ and self handicapping theories. These lead into questions about self-esteem which I explore briefly in 2.3.3.

2.3.1. Fear of success

A controversial body of work grew out of Matina Horner's proposition that 'women of ability' have a greater tendency than men to 'fear' success (Horner, 1968 (cited in Hoffman); 1969; Hoffman, 1974) and this, in part, helped account for why women of ability were less likely to achieve career successes equivalent to their male counterparts. Despite early interest in the theory's potential explanatory power (Tresemer, 1976a), a number of wide ranging, damaging critiques have been offered with reference to how the original research questions were conceptualised, the method of investigation, and the interpretive claims made (Tresemer, 1976a; 1976b; Zuckerman and Wheeler, 1975). A valuable review of women, motivation and achievement theory by Hyde and Kling (2001) suggests research on fear of success (FOS), or the motive to avoid success, has largely faded away. Nevertheless, there are periodic attempts to reinvigorate the field which suggests that, despite extensive critique, the notion of women's 'fear of success' continues to hold some kind of narrative capital (Metzler and Conroy, 2004; Singh and Agrawal, 2007).

Horner's original study (1969 and see Tresemer, 1976a and 1976b for a valuable introduction) presented participants, all psychology undergraduates, with a series of verbal thematic apperception tests (TATs). These were cue sentences such as "Tom is looking into his microscope" (cited in Tresemer 1976a). Participants were asked to write short stories in response. It was Horner's (1969) report of the sixth of these cue sentences which has underpinned much subsequent attention to FOS. The sixth cue sentence was given to female participants as: *At the end of first term finals Anne finds herself at the top of her medical school*

class; and given to men as: *At the end of first term finals John finds himself at the top of his medical school class* (Tresemer, 1976a). Participants' stories were then coded for content. FOS was measured by scoring comments expressing any negative imagery in response to 'Anne' doing well (Horner, 1969). These included any references to negative consequences, to negative affect, to instrumental activity away from the field – such as changing jobs to more traditional female work, and any 'bizarre, inappropriate, unrealistic, or nonadaptive responses to the situation described by the cue' (Hoffman, 1974:355). This is a broad sweep, and one which imports some questionable assumptions that these categories of response all suggest FOS. Nevertheless, Horner concluded women of ability were simultaneously motivated to avoid failure, motivated to *achieve* success and motivated to *avoid* success. These alleged motivations to avoid success, Horner argued, arose out of fear of negative consequence, social rejection, and loss of femininity. Collectively, she claimed, these indicated an underlying fear of success. Crucially, Horner added that this underlying motive to avoid success 'is a stable disposition within the person, acquired early in life' (Horner, 1969:38).

Seu (1998) argues that locating cause in this way, within women's stable internal psychological states, allows social structures to be written out of explanations. While Horner (1969) did recognise social pressure to conformity, and was alert to social structures which helped maintain the dilemma women experienced, she argued that women fuelled their own 'psychological barrier' to success. This firmly located the resolution to the 'dilemma' of success within women's psychology, and reinforced the separation of social life into

psychological and sociological divisions.

The original study has been subject to much scrutiny, much of it methodological. For example, a particular concern has been the manner in which meaning-making variables were controlled. Gravenkemper and Paludi (1983) for instance cite a range of amendments to the projective cue. Tresemer (1974), with others, suggested Horner's medical school cue was too specific because it placed the female character, Anne, in what was a male dominated field: perhaps participants were reacting to sex-role appropriateness rather than FOS. So, Tresemer's cue became 'After much work, Joe(Judy) has finally gotten what he (she) wanted.' But, Gravenkemper and Paludi suggest this implied causal attributions to effort and ability in the phrase 'after much work'. In the same vein they noted potential attributions to luck in Horner's original cue 'finds her(him)self'. For both studies they queried whether participants were reacting to attributional claims rather than successful outcomes. By way of resolution, they opted instead for 'Anne has succeeded' and 'John has succeeded'. Casting back to the discussion of attribution studies earlier in this chapter, these different versions of the stimuli phrases illustrate nicely that attributions can be inherent in descriptions of achievement, not something 'separate'. But, rather than work with this quality of language-in-use, these studies try to eliminate attribution from the situations they manufacture.

These games of attempting to control meaning continue to be endemic to the field. Krishnan and Sweeney (1998) noted that Horner's original study provided a female cue – 'Anne', and male cue 'John'. Hyde and Kling (2001) point out that this is itself a confounding variable: females given one stimulus,

males another. But, this was not Krishnan and Sweeney's particular concern. Instead, they noted, without saying whom, that some critics have suggested 'Ann' [*sic*] invoked 'more femininity... contaminating the findings' (Krishnan and Sweeney, 1998:301). As a result, in a naïve methodological move, Krishnan and Sweeney named their female cue 'Susan' claiming this was more 'neutral' – again according to unreferenced 'prevailing research'. The principle that names may be neutral appears untenable in this context and difficult to imagine in any context. It is a particularly bizarre claim in this instance given that gender – via name – is the independent variable to be manipulated. Ironically, Krishnan and Sweeney (1998) did subsequently note, following a point from a reviewer, that 'Susan' might have invoked a particularly positive cue for female participants given their possible knowledge of the doctor character 'Susan' in the American television series 'ER'.

Clearly this way of doing psychology is wrestling with the idea that participants will 'make meanings'. It is both essential to the project – 'what *are* the projective meanings generated by participants'; and simultaneously seen as a major hurdle to be overcome, meaning-making is to be held in check. But, one cannot eliminate the imaginative contextualising work participants will undertake in order to make sense of the task set: indeed, participants *need* to make meaning to complete the task. This problem is compounded by the failure to appreciate the dynamic, situated and partial nature of language. These attempts at control take futile forms and ultimately display a blindness to the fertility of meaning-making language users will engage in.

In a series of studies Pollak and Gilligan (1982; Gilligan and Pollak, 1988)

used pictorial TATs which relied explicitly on this fertility. They asked participants to write imaginative stories in response to pictures. They too noted a pattern which they interpreted as women making connections between competitive success and danger by associating success with social isolation and relationship difficulties. (In contrast, men were reported to make connections between intimacy and danger.)

The detail of their methodology raises another important issue. Participants were presented with five pictures and for each one were asked: *What is happening? Who are the people? What has led to this situation? What has happened in the past? What is being thought? What is wanted? By whom?* And then, in a point of special importance to the kind of critique I am drawing on here, is this final instruction: participants were requested ‘to make their stories “interesting and dramatic”’ (Gilligan and Pollak, 1988:248).

This is an interesting approach. Potentially we could learn a lot from participants’ responses to this TAT challenge: participants will mobilise a revealing set of discursive resources to produce their stories. However, great caution is needed in regard to claiming that these imaginative stories could be interpreted as revealing characteristic states of mind or abiding traits. Gilligan and Pollak have assumed the stories indicate inner states, in this instance states of fearfulness and anticipations of danger. However, as with the critique made above in regard to appreciating the social actions inherent in doing attribution work, we need to ask careful questions here also about what participants are doing when they recruit one set of story resources over another. What kinds of narrative capitals do they have available? What inferences might be made? Rather than

revealing inner states, these imagined stories might simply (or indeed not so simply) be showing participants' skills in creative writing, or what they understand by 'interesting and dramatic', and more importantly for this study, what concepts and storylines, what interpretative repertoires, they had available for the task set. Like Horner's FOS study above, the ambivalence exhibited in the stories generated is an interesting puzzle; again it suggests some kind of dialogic dilemma is being reproduced. But, linguistic products, in this case TAT stories, are not neutral mirrors to the mind. They are partial, interested, situated, versioned social activities which have the potential to tell us much about the social world participants inhabit, but which require a sophisticated theory of language as social action to accomplish this.

Hyde and Kling (2001) suggested that fear of success literatures have lost momentum. However, one area of psychology which has re-opened propositions on women and FOS is psychoanalysis. A recent attempt to reinvigorate the field came from a conference in New York in April 2005 which was organised around the themes of women, FOS, and 'the unconscious saboteur' (Pappenheim, 2006). The concept of the unconscious saboteur is only loosely defined, but refers to involuntary unconscious behaviours stemming from the individual psyche and which sabotage people's attempts to achieve their goals.¹ Wrye (2006) recites examples of unconscious sabotage provided by her colleagues, such as accidentally deleting notes needed for writing a chapter, or failing to add one's professional qualifications to one's name on a professional workshop booklet

¹ There are a range of psychoanalytic theories which might offer explanations for 'unconscious sabotage' but a fully worked up review and critique of particular psychoanalytic theory lies outside the scope of this thesis. However, I do return to a debate between psychoanalytically inflected accounts of the person and discursively orientated accounts in chapter 3.3.

when other colleagues had done so. The term ‘unconscious saboteur’ receives scant attention outside of psychoanalysis but bears some resemblance to socio-cognitive concepts of self-handicapping in attribution and the impostor phenomenon addressed in studies of self-esteem. I discuss both of these below. On a final preliminary note to this section, the conference papers discussed here are framed by their authors as ‘fear of success’. Undoubtedly though there are overlaps here with notions of fear of failure coming up shortly. My continuance of that division is a pragmatic strategy rather than an intellectual conviction.

The papers from the unconscious saboteur conference focused on themes such as unconscious depression, rage, resentment, and feelings of failure. Pappenheim (2006:68) summarises this as ‘dysphoric feelings of guilt, shame, and self-loathing’ felt by many women as a consequence of a ‘forced ... inauthentic choice between their own ambition for autonomy and power on the one hand, and devotion to their children on the other’ (ibidem). Notably, the collection addresses both women who have children and women who do not, but this is done through a lens that assumes all women have an innate fundamental psychic need to be mothers. This assumption erases differences between women in favour of a monolithic category. In the next chapter I will be drawing on recent work on gender and intersectionality – the multiple identity ‘categories’ one subject may inhabit – to outline arguments against this homogenising tendency (see section 3.4).

Nevertheless, this set of unconscious saboteur articles does demonstrate an intriguing feature relevant to the interests of my study. This is the way in which highly educated women, with remarkable professional successes, some of whom

are also trained in managing anxieties and fears for themselves and others, are also reported speaking of their ongoing battles with anxieties about their success.

For example, Wrye (2006) says:

When I mentioned to several colleagues that I would be giving a paper on “... the unconscious saboteur,” I was struck by how many bright, accomplished psychoanalysts vigorously nodded their heads that they personally lived with the unconscious saboteur. I also had the same reply from a former patient, from a superstar in broadcast journalism, from my popular and gifted yoga teacher, and from my radiologist, who, even as the head of a phenomenally successful cancer treatment center whose “Doctor of the Year” awards line her office, still says she constantly battles the unconscious saboteur. (Wrye, 2006:70-71)

Wrye notes that common discourses constitute little in the way of positive notions of success or ambition in women, embedded as they are in phallogentric discourses marginalising women as inherently inadequate. Ironically Wrye’s own discourse does little to dispel this. Women are presented as inevitably and self-destructively struggling with success. Moreover, success is yet again marked out in a particularly restricted way, framed within a particular context of American individualism, and with little recognition of this as one version of success. With one unidentified exception (a former patient whose ‘successes’ are not worth mentioning), success means career success, and generally extraordinary success at that: in addition to the ‘accomplished psychoanalysts’, Wrye cites ‘a superstar’, a

‘popular *and* gifted’ specialist teacher, and ‘the head of a phenomenally successful cancer treatment center’ with multiple “Doctor of the Year” awards. If these are the models for success it is hardly surprising that many of us might experience some tensions as we relate to their talk of self doubt. Interestingly, while Wrye recognises that cultural discourses constitute and constrain the social moral orders women must negotiate, she argues that these moral orders are maintained and fuelled *internally* through hidden psychic determinants. This is the key distinction between Wrye’s position (see also Josephs, 2006; Ruderman, 2005) and the ones I draw upon for this study. In the position I will outline later, the constituents of success and failure, their moral ordering, and the troubled positions they orchestrate, are generated and maintained ideologically through (re)production in the intersubjective practices and conducts of everyday life (Billig, 1991; Rose 1996; 1999).

So, on the one hand psychoanalytically inflected talk of anxiety and unconscious self-sabotage could be a valuable resource as a pointer to ongoing trouble. On the other, whilst appearing to recognise the constitutive power of discourse, it nevertheless universalises and essentialises women, and places cultural tensions and the ‘solution’ to cultural tensions within the individual.

This critique holds despite other attempts to take cultural location seriously. For example, Rosas (2006) in the same special issue tries to weave a cultural account of subjectivity in with a psychodynamic model of FOS. Her topic is the emotional development of Mexican women and in particular, the continuation of ‘internal conflict and insecurity’ despite apparent economic and professional emancipation. Rosas’ recognition, albeit partial, of the constitutive

effect of time and place, and the creation of a space for a non-Western focus are both welcome additions to the literature. However, the paper tends to *assert*, rather than *explicate*. In the process it too essentialises much that it discusses, the mother-daughter relationship, for example, and sex stereotypes which it claims are ‘impossible’ to overturn and which prescribe against ambition and success for women. The arguments lack conceptual clarity, relying as they do on unelucidated concepts such as the ‘social unconscious’; and lack epistemological, and ontological clarity in talk of ‘natural’ responses to cultural productions.

Both papers, Wrye (2006) and Rosas (2006), typical of their field, suggest women are unconsciously, defensively, motivated to fear success. These internal states, variously supposed to originate from Oedipal conflicts (Josephs, 2006); or fear of the loss of the internal object of the mother (Ruderman, 2006); or some other internal self sabotage, all imply, as with Horner’s (1968) work above that women’s ambivalence to success is produced, generated and maintained as an internal process.

A more plausible and empirically supportable suggestion may be that women are reflexively engaged in competing ideological discourses (Billig, 1991; *et al.*, 1988); discourses which make sometimes conflicting demands, positioning women within and without competing moral orders which are made visible and empowered in the daily practices of institutions and technologies (Rose, 1996; 1999). If this is so, then these fear of success narratives and the unconscious saboteur narratives are highly pertinent resources, but as *meta-narratives*; discourses framing participant meaning-making, reproducing ‘knowledge’ rather than revealing truth, or in Foucauldian terms, as ‘a discursive regime that

reproduces its own meanings' (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006:21). This is the alternative I favour as a framework for thinking about the kinds of social action taking place in the quote from Wrye above (page 44). Undoubtedly, FOS literatures have been valuable in pointing to material concerns and to the notion that talking about success has the potential to generate imaginings of possible 'trouble' to be navigated. This indicates clearly that 'success', whatever that may be, is not simply, 'a good thing'. So, while like many other critics I take issue with the explanatory conclusions reached, the issues conceived in FOS studies – negative consequences, social rejection, loss of femininity, moral conflicts (Horner, 1968; Gravenkemper and Paludi, 1983, Wrye, 2006) are certainly *plausible* as material concerns for women and therefore deserving of investigation.

2.3.2. Fear of failure

A common counterpart to talk of FOS is fear of failure (FOF). Indeed, there are places where the distinction becomes difficult to sustain. One of the contributions of this thesis is to illustrate that the distinctions, where they exist, do so via the social action taking place, rather than via a simple lexicography. For the moment, I will work quite straightforwardly with the distinctions made in the existing literature.

Methodologically and conceptually FOF bears some resemblance to the FOS literatures already reviewed and so immediately this points to some of the criticisms that will be made in terms of talk as situated social action: FOF studies too lack an adequate theory of language. Similarly, it should of course hardly be

surprising that FOF points to ‘trouble’ for those experiencing it. For example, McGregor and Elliot (2005) found a positive correlation between shame and FOF manipulated by student test performance feedback. Those reporting high FOF went on to report higher levels of shame when encountering failure than those reporting low FOF:

For individuals high in fear of failure, achievement events are not simply opportunities to learn, improve on one’s competence, or compete against others. Instead, they are threatening, judgment-orientated experiences that put one’s entire self on the line... and that put one’s sense of relational security in jeopardy (McGregor and Elliot, 2005:229).

Rowe (1988), whose popular self-help books are grounded in clinical training, picks up a similar sense of extreme jeopardy in failing. She suggests that for some, the idea of failing is so powerfully fearful that it threatens to ‘annihilate’ the self:

If we know *self* we know *not-self*, and the threat of *not-self* is the greatest danger we can ever know...We can come to terms with bodily death... But if our self is destroyed, we have vanished, like a wisp of smoke in the wind or chalk off a blackboard... We feel the fear of this threat whenever ... we fail at something important to us.’ (Rowe, 1988:24-5).

Despite the lyrical but somewhat obscure rhetoric here, Rowe’s description

suggests failure is, for some of us at least, a catastrophic account of painful desolation.

Other accounts may be more tempered but still the dominant position in the literature is that failure is, by definition, negative. However, Martin and Marsh (2003) ask whether failure should be feared, or whether it may be ‘friend’ rather than ‘foe’. Their review of the literature suggests that while it can be both foe and friend, it is not a *good* friend. What they mean by this is that the motivation to avoid failure acts as a powerful drive to succeed. However, even where successes are frequent the fear of failure means anxiety and unstable self-esteem ‘come along for the ride’ (Martin and Marsh, 2003:32).

In some of the literature this is described as the impostor phenomenon. This was a term coined by Clance and Imes (1978) initially to describe high achieving women who reported feelings of being an impostor in their successful career achievements. That is, achieving high levels of success but also experiencing high levels of insecurity about deserving and maintaining those successes, and exhibiting intense fear of imminent failure and being ‘found out’ to be inadequate or incompetent (Want and Kleitman, 2006). Since its early days the impostor concept has been extended to include men’s experience as well although there are conflicting findings for any relationship between gender and the impostor phenomenon (Kumar and Jagacinski, 2006; Langford and Clance, 1993). Recent studies suggest a correlation between the impostor phenomenon and with depression (McGregor, Gee and Posey, 2008).

A review of the literature by Langford and Clance (1993) indicates the impostor phenomenon continues to be understood as a stable personality trait

correlating highly with parenting styles and reflecting high levels of insecurity and extreme sensitivity to criticism, all correlating with a particular attributional style which locates success externally. Failure is interpreted as proof of suspected incompetence and can lead to counter-productive self protection. This might be either through ‘self-handicapping’ or ‘defensive pessimism’(Martin and Marsh, 2003). Both of these concepts warrant much more critical attention than space here allows but some brief introduction is necessary.

Self-handicapping (Jones and Berglas, 1978) refers to behaviours such as procrastination for example, or failing to prepare for an examination; behaviours which are likely to interfere with achieving the outcome aimed for. These behaviours are taken up voluntarily, as a ready made excuse in the event of failing to achieve the goal (Martin and Marsh, 2003; Want and Kleitman, 2006). This handicapping behaviour deflects attributions for failure away from personal ability and towards some other factor. This interpretation side-steps the psychoanalytic accounts given above. Rather than unconscious involuntary sabotaging drives, self-handicapping in this version is a strategy mediating discomfort for those high in FOF. It allows the claim that one has the ability, but something else got in the way. However, while this argument almost appears to recognise that ‘doing attribution’ is a dynamic form of accounting, it continues to direct attention internally, to private processes, rather than externally to the social accountability practices which require people to take up particular positions in relation to particular contingent discursive constructions of ‘failure’.

Theories of defensive pessimism are subject to the same critique. Defensive pessimism means setting low expectations of success to cushion against

emotional affect in the event of failure (Norem and Cantor 1986); or alternatively, setting safer, more easily attainable goals and lower standards for success (Baumgarden and Brownlee, 1987; Showers and Ruben, 1990), ultimately leading to underachievement (Martin and Marsh, 2003).

How one reacts to failure is a central issue for Cigman (2001) also, who like Martin and Marsh (2003) above cautions against oversimplifications of links between success, failure and negative effects. Cigman's interests are in implications of failure for education, but she extends her argument more broadly. Her aim was to draw a distinction between failing well and failing badly. By failing well she means being able to accept failing as a temporary instance which preserves self-esteem and boosts positive motivation to succeed in another instance; as opposed to failing badly, which means to see oneself as incapable and without worth. This shares some similarities with the position Shields *et al.* (2005) offered (page 27 above) in that people may be resilient to failure when they have the resources to make sense of themselves as in control of future success. This is a broader ethical project for Cigman though. She argues that what she calls the grey area between success and failure is where people:

grapple with ethical questions about what really matters. One may fail bravely or timorously, intelligently or stupidly, not to mention wisely or unwisely. A person may fail because she has set herself extraordinary rather than ordinary targets, and this may merit praise. Failing is not easy; one may do it more or less 'successfully', and I have suggested that the capacity to fail well is a precondition for many future successes. (Cigman,

2003:574-5).

Essentially, Cigman is arguing that interpretations of success and failure are crucial components to people's sense of themselves and their resilience to challenge. I am not so much arguing against this position as suggesting we do not properly know what people's interpretations of success and failure are, and with what *variety of purpose* these constructs are deployed. Too little attention has been paid to what interpretative resources people draw on when they negotiate meanings of success and failure. Without this empirical investigation abstract claims, however plausible and potentially persuasive, continue to be deeply undermined. In this next section I take this concept of interpretation, and mattering, a little further by exploring connections between success, failure and self esteem.

2.3.3. Success, failure and self-esteem

The literatures introduced so far on FOS, FOF and attribution, have already started to make connections between success, failure, and self-esteem. Emler (2001) suggests in his review of self-esteem literatures, it is both a lay and scientific supposition that:

Real successes should raise self-esteem. Real failures should lower self-esteem. A history of continual success should secure permanently high self-esteem. Experience of continual failure should result in chronic low self-esteem. (Emler, 2001:38)

However, Emler acknowledges considerable scepticism towards these propositions. Working from a constructionist perspective I would raise some obvious questions about what ‘real success’ or ‘real failure’ might be. That aside, Emler’s point is to argue that there is surprisingly little evidence for any global connections between actual successes or failures, and levels and consistency of measures of self-esteem, or indeed the much touted alleged relationship between low self-esteem, violence, criminality and poverty (Emler, 2001; see also Brown and Dutton, 1995). He suggests instead that the effects of successes or failures on self-esteem depend upon *perception*, that is whether individuals themselves take outcomes to be successful or failing, and just as important, although this has received much less attention, with whether particular sites of success and failure are taken to *matter*. As he points out, this takes us back directly to William James (1890).

I, who for the time have staked my all on being a psychologist, am mortified if others know much more psychology than I. But I am contented to wallow in the grossest ignorance of Greek. My deficiencies there give me no sense of personal humiliation at all. Had I ‘pretensions’ to be a linguist; it would have been just the reverse. So we have the paradox of a man shamed to death because he is only the second pugilist or the second oarsman in the world. That he is able to beat the whole population of the globe minus one is nothing; he has ‘pitted’ himself to beat that one; and as long as he doesn’t do that nothing else counts. He is

to his own regard as if he were not, indeed he *is* not.

Yonder puny fellow, however, whom every one can beat, suffers no chagrin about it, for he has long ago abandoned the attempt to ‘carry that line,’ as the merchants say, of self at all. With no attempt there can be no failure; with no failure no humiliation. So our self-feeling in this world depends entirely on what we *back* ourselves to be and do. (James, 1890:310, original emphases)

In effect, James is saying that it is how we take outcomes to reflect back on our sense of self, our sense of who we are, that matters; not some ‘objective’ measures of success or failure *per se*.

Over a century later, Brown and Dutton (1995) were trying to disentangle much the same issue. They noted some studies suggest people with low self-esteem (LSE) experience greater emotional distress following failure than people with high self-esteem (HSE). Other studies suggest HSE and LSE make no difference to emotional responses to failure. Brown and Dutton suggest a possible resolution to this inconsistency lies in distinguishing different ways of measuring emotional responses to success and failure. Some studies measure people’s reports of feelings according to whether they are ‘pleasant/unpleasant’, ‘happy/unhappy’, or ‘glad/sad’, etc. Others measure reports of feelings implicating self-worth, such as pride, humiliation, shame, etc. It is this second set, they suggest, which interacts with HSE and LSE. To test this they studied self-worth measures amongst undergraduate students following linguistic tests. The task was to provide a common associate of three cue words (their example is

‘car’, ‘swimming’, and ‘cue’, all associated with ‘pool’). In the success condition the task was easy; in the failure condition the task was difficult. Results suggested self-esteem effects were stronger for those emotions implicating self-worth, rather than the more general unpleasant emotions. Moreover, the effect was greater following failure. In short, both HSE and LSE groups ‘feel good (happy and proud) when they succeed’, but differences emerge when people fail: ‘[feelings of self-worth] plummet among LSE people but remain relatively high among HSE people’ (Brown and Dutton, 1995:718).

There is an important critique to be mentioned here. Brown and Dutton are concerned with the salience of failures or successes for people’s sense of self worth. Emler points out that in the highly active field of self-esteem research (and beyond), the overwhelming majority of tests are explicitly or implicitly tests of intellectual competence, a form of success particularly privileged by academic researchers; and participants are almost always students, for whom this particular domain carries particular significance. This was precisely the point behind the now famous critique that the study of psychology was largely the study of psychology students (Gergen, 1973; Sears, 1986). What is startling is that thirty years on Norenzayan and Heine (2005) are still able to make the same critique of much contemporary work, arguing that it represents the continuing implicit assumptions in experimental psychology of generalizability outside of time, era and social class. This is a serious problem and is indicative of a general failure to take seriously the context of meaning-making – the repertoires available, the ideological dilemmas lived out, the semiotic histories that make up a life, and the interactional demands of the moment.

The underpinning assumptions about the ontology of the person in Brown and Dutton's work, for example, are quite different from those I draw on for this thesis. Their experimental reductionism sits unhappily against the approach used here with the focus on contingent variability in talk, where language is situated, constitutive, variable social action and so on. But, the point Brown and Dutton make, that what matters is what gets reflected back on to people's sense of self, is a particularly useful one for this thesis. Like James' introspectionist account, their work points forcefully to the need to work directly with people's *constructions* of success and failure, and in particular, most importantly, with the way these constructions reflect back on speakers in particular interested and invested ways. The constructions speakers mobilise in their talk of success and failure, and the way in which these are integrated with other repertoires about what it is to be a particular kind of person, in a particular time and place, is enormously consequential for the kinds of self constructed in particular kinds of talk. Combine this with some reach for the personal, moral, ordering reproduced in our talk, what kinds of person we think we and others should be, and we have something of consequence to attend to.

2.4. Marking out success: career, status, and gender.

I just want to take a step back for the moment. So far, I have looked at how psychology has typically explained reports of lay explanations for what *causes* success and failure; reports about what success and failure *feel* like, in terms of the fear they generate, the implications for self-esteem; but we still have little sense of what success and failure might be held to 'be'. Certain sites have been

getting marked out with some regularity; most notably, career (for example, Sturges, 1999; Dyke and Murphy, 2006), and eminent careers at that (Pahl, 1995; Schlosser, 2001) but also academic successes, in attribution studies and correlations with self-esteem in feedback on intelligence tests (McGregor and Elliot, 2005). Sporting achievements are also commonly marked out as sites for success (Locke, 2004) and in the growing field of health psychology behaviours such as giving up smoking, maintaining exercise programs and so on (Schoeneman and Curry, 1990). What stands out however, is that these sites, and the markers of success associated with them, such as ‘promotion’ and ‘financial progression’ in career terms, ‘winning’ in sport, passing exams in academic settings, are usually taken for granted in the literature as self-evidently successful, or (less marked and more implicit) an absence of such markers to be self-evidently failing. There is seldom any critical attempt to explore this. Shaver (1976) and Tresemer (1976a) both made this point in relation to Horner’s study of women’s fear of success and much of the work following in the wake of that makes an assumption that success means specifically career and/or academic success. Despite their recognition that this reflects a particular cultural time and space, attention to this characteristic has been left largely underdeveloped. Even where studies set out to examine constructions of success, some key presumptions about *sites* of success are left uninterrogated, most particularly that *careers* should be a primary route for building identities of success.

Sturges (1999) used a grounded theory analysis to ask what career success meant for male and female managers of different age groups and noted a range of differences in conceptions pointing to much more complexity than previous

literature had recognised. This potentially makes the paper an interesting interlocutor for my thesis. However, there are profound differences in the way this thesis approaches participants' talk and the approach to talk from grounded analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Sturges' analysis identifies interesting patterns in themes, such as managers prioritising enjoyment, expertise, and influence rather than financial reward. She identifies four different orientations to career success: Climbers, Experts, Influencers, Self-Realizers. Sturges suggests women have a broader definition of success in comparison with men (see also Dyke and Murphy, 2006, for a similar finding from a thematic analysis of female and male high career achievers). In Sturges' study, women were more likely to value accomplishment and recognition, job content was valued over grade; men were more likely to value hierarchical positions, and accompanying status and influence. Older workers in the sample, managers in their forties, were more likely to value enjoyment of job content and having influence, over hierarchical position and grade. Sturges suggests that this indicates two things. One, it reflects women's socialisation to be less competitive and individualised than men and to value connections with others more; and two, it indicates a psychological adaptation by aging employees to realistic expectations and opportunities. As companies de-layer, hierarchical advancement is harder to attain, and this is more so she suggests for women and older workers.

Sturges argues that these categories do not represent 'different types of managers, but rather are a means of categorizing the different ways in which the managers who participated in this study *talked* about career success' (Sturges, 1999:244-5, my emphasis). Success is framed differently for participants who are

differently situated. And yet, when Sturges raises all too briefly the possibility that these definitions of success might be moderated by the way it reflects back on speakers, such as whether they appear mercenary or status conscious (or indeed failing), she quickly dismissed this on quite bizarre grounds. Her brief argument points out that the phenomena appear robust insofar as other studies have found these kinds of patterns in talk. She uses *this* to suggest that one can therefore more confidently assume this suggests individual predispositional factors. But this is simply illogical. One might just as well, and indeed preferably, say the robustness of the patterns indicates this is a pervasive ideological dilemma which people negotiate in similar ways, drawing on shared interpretative resources, and attentive to culturally normative moral orders in talk fit for the situation (Billig, 1991; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). What Sturges' data suggest is that negotiating talk of success and failure is enormously complicated, diverse, and consequential social *action*. Unfortunately her analysis stops short of pursuing the connection between 'talk' and the social action talk accomplishes. The same is true of Dyke and Murphy's (2006) analysis of their Canadian sample of high achievers. Their study is certainly interesting in the way it illustrates gendered differences in the way success is spoken of. Men prioritised material success and women prioritised work-life balance and making a contribution. However, they also note:

Our findings may also have been influenced by the social desirability of responses. Women may have responded that relationships are important to them because they are aware that society expects such an answer. (Dyke and Murphy, 2006:368)

So, the situated and contingent nature of talk, the way it reflects back on the speaker, and the action talk carries for working up particular identities, all of this is nodded to here, but as a confounding quality which frustratingly receives no further analytic attention in their language neutral approach.

Wagner and Wodak's (2006) study of British and European women's talk of career success drew on a sample drawn from two kinds of site: fields traditionally dominated by men (such as architecture), and new fields where identities are being newly worked up (such as IT and multimedia). Like Sturges, a stated aim was to explore women's new ways of working up what counts as success. While their starting point – career – reinforces the taken for granted ideological assumptions about career as a self-evident primary measure of success, they do recognise it is one which is far from straightforward in the ambivalent accounting it gives rise to. However, again, their analysis never quite tackles this head on.

Methodologically the analysis is a strange hybrid of content analysis, representations analysis, metaphor analysis, some attention to ideological dilemmas, and an all too brief and undeveloped reference to social action. The results lack epistemological discipline. For example, Wagner and Wodak read the discourse of public-private space used by the architects in their sample as *gendered* relational metaphors where inside-outside may be read as metaphor for the body. First, there is no comparative data from male architects to support this gendered claim; moreover, at no point do they ask whether talk of configuring public-private space is better explained as the discourse of *architecture*, rather

than the discourse of *women* who are architects.

Beyond this, there is a bigger concern that talk in this study is again treated as a representation of something ‘real’: Wagner and Wodak write of speakers’ ‘beliefs’ (2006:389), moreover, of *our* beliefs as the audience for this talk (2006:395), distinctions are made between talk as performance and ‘actual’ behaviour, as if the former is not behaviour (2006:386), finally, in a conclusion which lacks any empirical support, they claim ‘a significant gap between performances and *organizational realities*’ (2006:407, my emphasis). No analysis has been offered as to ‘organizational realities’.

Some valuable pointers do come from the contrasts Wagner and Wodak find with previous literature on success anxiety. They report that participants in their study speak in very positive terms of success. They also note though that this is not without ambivalence. For example, one of the themes identified is the expression of a desire to be visibly recognised as successful by others. This theme runs alongside a counterpart where participants describe themselves as setting their own measures of success and not being led by what others expect. Wagner and Wodak suggest other possible inconsistencies, such as talk of enjoying fame, whilst simultaneously down-playing it. Analysis makes passing references to Billig’s (1991; 1996) notion of ideological dilemmas and rhetorical accomplishments as a means of understanding the ambivalences displayed. However, the interactional context in which the talk occurs, and the performance of success as a *requirement* of the interview is entirely overlooked. One of the few occasions where analysis refers explicitly to the social action in language is in a throwaway comment about the modesty work accomplished in women’s talk of

luck in career success. This brief comment raises yet more important questions about what participants are *doing* in their talk but again these questions remain unanswered. Overall, the socio-cognitive, socio-linguistic, critical, but realist account Wagner and Wodak offer entices with the phenomena it sets out, but disappoints in the lack of epistemological discipline it brings to analysis of the situated interactional work taking place in the talk reported.

A study by Smulyan (2004) exploring teachers' and doctors' definitions of career success again generated fascinating data but is subject to much of the same critique. Her all female sample of women from an elite 'highly selective' college in the USA looked at the changing career identities over ten years of women who went on to become doctors or teachers. Her analysis shows participants negotiating a range of conflicting discourses and identity positions framed around themes of 'wanting to help'; 'balancing the personal and the professional'; and 'status and success'. This starts to point to wider configurations for talking up 'success' but again there is the usual problem in that participants are categorised in advance as elite students, carrying their own and other people's high expectations, going into professional posts which carry particular statuses. A second point of particular interest is the extent to which Smulyan's data, like Wagner and Wodak's, shows considerable accounting work by participants. The following is a data extract from one of Smulyan's 1995 interviews with a teacher:

I was struggling with myself, like I felt like I should be something else other than what I am. And I really think that it's kind of who I am that I am an educator, that I care about education. I like to teach. I like to work

with people. And all these things are a part of me. And you know, there's some voice inside me saying it's not good enough somehow. That I should be doing more. That I should have some name-droppable job or something. But, you know, I think I'm really lucky in that I can look forward to going to work most days, which apparently a lot of people don't. (Data extract from Smulyan, 2005:240)

This short extract is shot through with accounting, with rhetorical strategies, with ideological reproductions, and more. Unfortunately Smulyan's analysis, whilst constructionist in its philosophical approach, does not attend to language specifically as situated contingent interactional social action and as a consequence misses the centrality of this accounting process. I will be taking up this point in the empirical chapters here (5, 6, 7 and 8) where I will be working with similar data but much more attentively to language as social action.

One small but intriguing point of note in this data extract is that like Wagner and Wodak's participants above, and Locke's study of elite athletes' attributions for success and failure (see page 34), participants again draw on 'luck' as a strategy for managing accounting. Smulyan makes no comment about this but it is certainly worth attention. Talking about luck accomplishes sophisticated social action. Above, Försterling *et al.* (2007) talk about attributions to luck being a means to derogate others. In Locke's study, luck was a discursive resource for managing modesty, but simultaneously allowing the speaker to 'do success' – to speak openly about his successes. 'Success' there was not in dispute, but luck served to manage the interactional moment by adhering to and

reproducing norms of politeness. In marked contrast, Smulyan's data suggests luck is being used in this instance to boost a much more limited claim to success; to endorse and prop up a potentially disputed success. To claim that the situation is lucky is to claim it has value, and thereby to take on an *identity* of a person having something of value (McAvoy, 2004). It allows the speaker to claim a form of success despite the doubts she expresses when she says 'I should be something else...it's not good enough...'. This is an area which requires much more attention but already, this additional level of analysis, with its emphasis on *action*, makes available a much greater sense that 'success' is a complicated and troubled identity to manage. But what is missing, is a closer analysis of when trouble manifests; in what kinds of interactions; and how it is managed; and what other resources, outside of career, and material achievement speakers might have available to work up; what other sites and forms of success 'work', or fail to work; what business is accomplished by setting out different markers for successes and failures, and what are the various reflexive stakes for working up particular identities.

These studies of women and career success point to an enormous range of complicated, nuanced, accountability-demanding identity work, which form a commonplace of stories of the self, and yet which are grossly under researched in terms of the precise form function and accomplishments they constitute.

2.5. Summary and conclusions

This chapter has reviewed a broad range of typical approaches in psychology to studies of 'success' and 'failure' and along the way has pointed to a number of

particular and related critiques. Phenomena associated with concepts of success and failure, such as people's attributions, the variability in how attributions are worked up, people's ambivalence towards high achieving performances, and the dilemmas women negotiate in working up identities of success, particularly in terms of career, and indeed variability in what counts as success or failure; all these have typically and conventionally been constructed empirically and interpreted theoretically with too little reference to the social setting in which these phenomena are lived out, with an inadequate model of the person, and with an inadequate, or indeed absent theory of language. The turn to language across the social sciences has provided a compelling argument for re-thinking both. The next chapter takes up this argument

Chapter 3. Theorising discursive subjects

The previous chapter has presented some illustrations of the way success and failure have been understood as psychologically pertinent concepts within traditional modes of research. But, running alongside that, it also illustrated some of the key critiques which arose out of the turn to language and the related developments in discursive psychology. So, while that previous review provides interesting phenomena to think about, the critique demonstrated that to understand the implications and consequences of discourses of success and failure for speakers, for subjectivity and identity as successful or failing subjects, a more convincing notion of the subject is needed. This is one theorised within this discursive framework as a subject constituted in discursive practice, not one who merely uses language to reflect some other 'reality'. This chapter gathers the intellectual resources needed in order to capture much more richly that subject pointed to in the turn to language.

The first section, 3.1, briefly outlines poststructural theories of self and identity; Foucauldian grand theories of subjectification, power and technology, fleshed out with an account of the psy complex, and neoliberal meritocratic individualisation which gives a particular reading to the idea of a successful subject. These meta theories, though, are charged with insufficient empirical specificity for lived life experiences, and a clearer theory of language-in-use is needed to resolve the critique. Therefore, section 3.2 addresses language practice more closely by outlining Bakhtinian ideas of language as dialogic, and considers how this has been elaborated through accounts of ideological (re)productions,

positioning theories and psycho-discursive concepts of trouble, and imaginary positions. An influential but contestable critique however, has been to question whether this psycho-discursive perspective has the capacity to theorise adequately emotions, moments of investment, and so on. Section 3.3 therefore, explores this critique from the perspective of a psychoanalytically informed psychosocial theory. I recognise the appeal of a psychoanalytically inflected approach but I contest some of the crucial assumptions and methods. In the process, I set out the theoretical position I take up for this thesis. This establishes my position as one firmly located within a dynamic dialogic and reflexive psycho-discursive framework.

Throughout this chapter runs an argument that in order to make sense of ‘success’ and ‘failure’ as consequential and variable elements in practices of subjectivity and identity for contemporary women in Britain, one needs to understand the subject as contingently constituted and occupying multiple positions, subjectivities and identities. The final section, 3.4, complements this argument by exploring ideas of multiple locations and developments in theories of intersectionality. The focus for this is on configurations of gender, age, and class.

This chapter, then, establishes thoroughly the theoretical framework for working, and points to the key debates which will inform and flow through subsequent empirical chapters.

3.1. Poststructural theories of self and identity

Poststructural theories of the self begin with the concept of the person as a subject constituted in language, organised and understood through discourses and, in a

crucial development of a Saussurean structuralist approach, posits a subject not fixed, but one that is provisional, contingent, situated and open to contest. The common starting point for elaborating this poststructuralist position is Foucault's genealogical work on knowledge productions and discursive regimes (e.g., Foucault, 1961; 1969; 1973; 1975; 1976; 1984). This is an anti-essentialist, anti-humanist perspective, where subjects and subjectivities are understood to be produced by circulations of 'knowledges' and the flows of power coming from the organisations of knowledge. This Foucauldian account provides the heavyweight theoretical resource for understanding my *opening* orientation to the 'subjects' of social psychology.²

3.1.1. Making subjects, making selves: Foucault and subjectification

Foucault's argument is that the subject is formed in and by discourses; discourses that constitute the world in particular ways, with particular regimes of knowledge, which generate particular ways of doing things (Foucault, 1961; 1973). These knowledges divide the world up into sites of practices and meanings, and people come to understand the world and themselves in relation to these regimes of knowledge. As we operate within these discursive regimes, we are also operating on ourselves, making subjects of ourselves, to ourselves via the flows of discourses circulating around and through us.

For Foucault, these regimes of knowledge were primarily theorised as

² There are other routes in to understanding the rise, premises and reach of poststructuralism – Lacan's development of Freudian psychoanalysis through a theorisation of language and the symbolic order is one such alternative (Lacan, 1977; Homer, 2005). However, see Billig (2006) on the fundamental flaw in the central Lacanian concept of the mirror stage. In addition, the emphasis on 'the law of the father' in the Lacanian argument, with its implication for an inevitability of male dominance, is a position I reject. However, constraints of time and space set this debate outside the scope of my interests for this study.

acting on the body, through a wide range of disciplinary practices – governmental, legal, medical, and so on (Foucault, 1961; 1973; 1975). Through engagement with these practices, people come to understand themselves and others as, for example, citizens, with rights, responsibilities, as embodied subjects living within a conventionally formulated framework of health or illness, youth and aging, as kin, daughters, mothers, family, and so on. These ‘ways of knowing’ (Lawler, 2008) are socially constructed. This claim to social construction is not to deny the materiality of the body for example; rather it points to the manner in which socially constructed knowledges, such as dividing actions into categories indicating mental illness, crimes, and so on, organise both the material world, such as the body, and the abstract world, such as justice (McNay, 1991).

This notion of knowledges constructing ways of being in the world, is intimately linked with power and the way power operates is a crucial concept for this thesis.

Power has often been conceived primarily as a top down process; prohibitive, and oppressive (Hall, 1997). The Marxist concept of ideology as a set of practices which maintain the privilege of the ruling class over subordinated classes is a prime example (Wetherell and Potter, 1992). Foucault conceived of power in different terms, not as a uni-directional force, solely passing down from governments, laws, institutions and other authorities. Rather, power is a *circulating* force, flowing down, up, and through all the social relations and the minutiae of daily practices which ground power in lived life. So, although Foucault argued that the practices of knowledge regimes support the interests of ruling or dominant groups, he also argued that power is not exclusively the

province of the privileged. The complexity of Foucault's writing on this is notorious (see Hook 2007 for a detailed discussion), but some threads need to be clarified here.

Discourses are regimes of knowledges about how to do being a person, how to do relating to the world. Discourses then, do not simply constitute repressions and controls; they also constitute possibilities and prescriptions for pleasures (Foucault, 1975). Furthermore, different knowledge regimes operate in relation to each other, producing different opportunities for ways, and sites, of being a subject, as the regimes circulate in interconnecting flows. These flows operate at the grand and the local level, from governments, hospitals, churches, to homes, families and intimate relationships.

Knowledges are not simply, factually, 'true' or 'false'. They are socially constructed, and as they get taken up they take on a prevailing status of 'truth'. This status makes them difficult, but not impossible, to challenge. This possibility for challenge, for resistance, is a contentious point in readings of Foucault. For example Billig (1996:14-6) draws a line between his own work on subjects as products and producers of discourse, and Foucault's, over just this point. Billig reads the Foucauldian subject as one unable to speak outside of locked down unitary discourses. This is a position Billig rejects in favour of a theory of language which is inevitably shifting in its interactional use and by this nature makes openings for argumentation (see section 3.2). However, Butler (1993) uses the same argument, illustrated by resignification of terms such as 'queer', to explain how the Foucauldian subject *is* capacitated by the slippage in language. As constructions, knowledge regimes are always under threat, more or less,

sooner or later, of alternative configurations. So, while some discourses are particularly abiding, they are not entirely stable; the slippage in meaning, inherent in language and more importantly, language in use, means alternatives arise, with possibilities for subversions and resistances and new ways of doing.

The crucial point here though, is that discourses are productive power. Production works through circulating knowledges about ‘ways of doing’ things to generate acting subjects who come to know themselves in certain ways by acting with those knowledges that circulate. This conjures up a very different image of the psychological subject from the last chapter. There the subject was the rational unitary owner of language, inhabiting a space outside of language, and using language as a neutral reflection of an internal individualised perspective on the world. Instead, in this chapter we see a subject who is situated in language, contingent on available regimes of ‘truth’; multiply positioned by different knowledge regimes, which interconnect, in sometimes conflicting ways; and which are taken up in practices of living. This subject then is a discursive contributor to the production of her or his self, and her or his way of being in the world. What is more, understanding the subject formed in multiple discourses in this way, offers resources for understanding the variable and contradictory practices people execute (Lucey and Rogers, 2007; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). I revisit this in section 3.2 when I discuss the interactive mobilisation of subject positions in local discursive orders. For the moment I want to concentrate on the meta narratives organising the production of subjects.

The format in which dominant, routine power is exercised is not fixed, even though it may show long periods of apparent stability. For example,

Foucault (1976) argued the contemporary Western forms of governing populations have passed from sovereign power, the juridical, an ‘obey or be punished’ form dominating up to the mid 19th century; to the current forms which are instead regulatory, or self-disciplinary, an ‘obey or be ill, unhappy, [and] unfulfilled’ form (Lawler, 2008). This regulatory power operates contingently through government strategies and social policies promoting ‘normalisation’ (Foucault, 1975; Rose 1996). Lawler’s (2000) work on the technologies of mothering and the scrutinising practices of midwives, health visitors, social workers and so on, is an example of the kind of work which has grown out of this theoretical framework. Significantly, these scrutinising practices, whilst being ‘steering mechanisms’ are not simply institutionally led; in addition, they lead mothers to act on themselves, to take up self-inspections of their performances as ‘good mothers’. This regulatory, self disciplining form of governmentality induces *reflection* on the self: in the *practice* of these knowledge regimes of good mothering, mothers come to *know* themselves – and other mothers – as particular kinds, good, or bad.

This notion of the self-inspecting self-disciplining subject – via the technologies and practices of language – is central to my examination of women’s constructions of the successful or failing self, and others. The practices of language are both the sites and means for ‘knowing’ the self in these ways.

For Rose (1996; 1999), this production of a self-monitoring self is intimately connected to the current neoliberal market economies of the west. These ideas are developed in the following sections; first with an exploration of the self monitoring subject of the psy complex, and then connecting this to a

neoliberal framework of individualisation and self-improvement.

3.1.2. The psy complex

The most well known elaboration of the influence of the psy complex has come from Nikolas Rose's work on governmentality and the constitution of selves, mind, and categorisations of behaviour (Rose, 1985; 1996; 1999; see also Miller and Rose, 2008). The psy complex refers to that collection of 'psy' knowledge regimes – psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, psychometrics, etc., which establish knowledges and supply the tools, the technologies, for shaping subjects and behaviours along axes of normalisation; subjects shaped into categories and classes of 'normal' both by acts on the subject by the expert, and importantly, acts on the self by the self taking up circulating psy discourses.

The psy complex is crucial to understanding a Foucauldian critique of the kinds of psychologies discussed in chapter 2. For example, rather than attributions being seen as a 'natural' evaluation of cause and effect (section 2.2); and rather than 'fear of failing' stories being a 'natural' expression of inner fears (section 2.3), all of which sees language as representative of internal states; we have instead an appreciation of how the discourses of the psy disciplines create the language 'out there' for what is experienced as the real and private self 'in here' (Rose, 1999).

There is still relatively little empirical work exploring the functioning of the psy complex as a constitutive force although Miller and Rose's work, particularly their analyses of the Tavistock Institute for Human Relations, is part of a compelling compendium (Miller and Rose, 2008). Other valuable

illustrations are emerging, such as the examinations of the way in which regimes of normalisation have been brought to bear on the family in western societies during the 20th century (Hollway, 2006; Ingleby, 1985; Lawler, 2000; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989, as examples).

This reading of the psy complex helps ground the poststructuralist argument that there is no natural 'truth', no real private self (Henriques *et al.*, 1984). There is only an epistemological self, a subject known to itself by being historically crafted in practices of (psy) regimes which teach the language of talking, and therefore thinking, about the 'self' in the same kinds of psy expertise ways (Billig, 1996; Parker, 1997; Rose, 1996; 1999).

Despite critical deconstruction, the psy technologies remain tremendously powerful and continue to exert a resistance to subversion. As Sloan says in his preface to recent work by Hook (2007):

ideological functions of psy-work and their subversion have been noted in previous scholarly work, but it is obvious from the ongoing expansion of the psychological enterprise that the critique is not taking hold.' (Sloan, in Hook, 2007:viii).

Rose (1999; see also Miller and Rose, 2008) argues that the growth in psy work, and particularly, the capacity of subjects to relate to themselves as autonomous individuals is intimately connected with contemporary neoliberal government:

[psy] is intrinsically linked with transformations in the practices for

‘the conduct of conduct’ that have been assembled in contemporary liberal democracies...I suggest, this history is not intelligible without taking account of the complex relations between problems of governability and the invention, stabilization, and institutionalization of psy knowledges.... In particular, I suggest that the novel forms of government being invented in so many ‘postwelfare’ nations at the close of the twentieth century have come to depend, perhaps as never before, upon instrumentalizing the capacities and properties of ‘the subjects of government’, and therefore cannot be understood without addressing these new ways of understanding and acting upon ourselves and others as selves ‘free to choose’ (Rose, 1996:)

I will come back to the individualising technologies of psy work and the fictive, political, production of subjects ‘free to choose’ (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989: 29; Skeggs, 2004) in more depth in chapter 6 where I examine the mobilisation of discourses of choice in the context of my own data. For the moment I want to address briefly the connection between self, identity, and success as a neoliberal, meritocratic subject.

3.1.3. Individualisation and the neoliberal, meritocratic subject

The psy knowledge/power discourses do not act on psychologised individuals in isolation from other knowledge/power discourses (Rose, 1996). The psy complex works in relations with other sets of discourses, some of which also act on subjects to encourage a reflective understanding of the self as a project to be

worked on. Prominent amongst these are the discourses of the neoliberal meritocratic subject; a subject who is able to transform her or his self into an 'authentic' and 'realised' self.

In the last thirty years, the increasing influences of markets and neoliberal ideology have transformed the social category of the individual. The individual struggle to create a personal identity has become the defining paradigm of how we live in Western cultures: we are called upon to invent our own identity and live in our own way and be true to ourselves. It is the means by which individuals struggle to give themselves meaning and representation. (Rutherford, 2007:19)

This concept of individuals having to invent their biographies for themselves according to their own wants and desires is at the heart of the 'individualisation theses' of both Beck (1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; 2001), and Giddens' (1991) 'reflexive project of the self'. The prominence of individualisation as the organising framework for westernised living is traced back to combined influences of the Protestant work ethic, urbanisation, secularisation, and the breakdown of traditional industrial, community and familial ties. As previous community and family bonds and restrictions were loosened, people were both more free and more expected to decide their own life trajectories.

However, Walkerdine (2003) illustrates what an insidious task is set this individualised, psychologised, self-regulatory, neoliberal subject

operating in an uncertain global economy. As she explains so well: it bites; hard.

While self-realisation is what is expected of the life project and one in which success is judged by the psychological capacities to succeed, the ability to handle uncertainty, the never knowing where work will come from etc., in fact produces an almost inevitable failure that will be lived as a personal failing, The issue is that, in the Foucauldian sense, the practices of subjectification produce a constantly failing subject who has to understand their position in essentially personal and psychological terms....

... One way in which governments can keep order is to make citizens responsible for their own self-regulation by producing discourses in which success as a constantly changing successful entrepreneur of oneself is possible. Psychology has a central role in providing both the discourses through which the psychologised self is understood and the clinical discourses and practices which put that subject together again after the inevitable failure. Equally important are the discourses through which that success and failure is understood and therefore the techniques of self-regulation and management which both inscribe the subject and allow him or her to attempt to refashion themselves as a successful subject: the subject of neo-liberal choice. (Walkerdine, 2003:241)

To be a successful subject in a neoliberal context then, is to ‘choose’ to constantly work on the self, to improve the self, via education, employment, the makeover – of home, garden or self, or the acquisition of other social capitals (see for example section 3.4.2 below on youthfulness as capital), all of which mark out ‘successful citizenship’ (Dench, 2006, cited in Nunn and Biressi, 2008; McRobbie, 2004). But, this moment of ‘becoming successful’ is always deferred, achieved only in partial, limited, snatched, moments, and thus is always in a state of being ‘not yet’, ‘not enough’, a state of ‘failing’ (Walkerdine, 2003).

More than that, the notion of choice is something of an ironic deceit. There is a compulsion to *understand* oneself as a choosing subject. For Walkerdine and Lucey, this starts with childhood.

Successful parenting rests on creating an illusion of autonomy so convincing that the child actually believes herself to be free. We believe that this fiction, this illusion of autonomy, is central to the travesty of the word ‘freedom’ embodied in a political system that has to have everyone imagining themselves to be free the better to regulate them. (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989: 29)

Individualisation is a compulsory quality of contemporary citizenship: practical moments of choice are woven into routine patterns of living – employment, living arrangements, education, and so on (Clarke, 2005; Clarke *et al.* 2006). Skeggs (2004) argues that the market rhetoric of

individualisation reproduced by Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992) organises not just around choice; but around a *moral imperative* to be an autonomous, agentic, ‘choosing’ self. There is ‘an ethical duty to self and society’ (Skeggs, 2004:57) to be a successful ‘entrepreneur of oneself’ (du Gay, 1996, cited in Walkerdine 2003). Lawler, like Walkerdine, argues that this subject-self is generally impossibly positioned in ‘a social system in which only a minority *can* ‘succeed’’ (Lawler, 2008:73). This is not the least because the pursuit of ‘successful’ individualisation – successful self-making – is a classed process (Skeggs, 2004). This is something Giddens in particular is accused of overlooking. Individualisation is classed both in terms of access to resources, *and* in terms of what constitutes ‘success’ – and of course ‘failure’. Skeggs’ work on the aesthetics of class argues that success is defined by middle class priorities, interests and habits, and that these priorities set a boundary between the successful self (that is a self exercising good middle class choice) and a failing self (a self exercising bad working class choice). This delineation of success by class is in direct collision with current discourses of meritocracy.

Young’s (1958) satire *The Rise of the Meritocracy* defined merit as ‘IQ plus effort’. It was intended to serve as a warning against the growing emphasis on defining ‘ability’ according to a narrow set of educational values (Young, 2001). Instead, as the concept has been taken up, first in America and then in Britain, it has largely been culled of its satirical origin. It has now taken on treacherous qualities – as Young (1958) predicted – legitimising inequalities on the grounds that those in receipt of social rewards and in positions of high status have earned and deserve the right to be there, by

virtue of their ability and effort. Meritocracy, the claim is, promotes the right men – and it is still usually men³ – for the job.

The National Child Development Study data-set, a longitudinal study of all children born in Britain between 3 and 9 March 1958 (Nettle, 2003), has been used by some to argue that British society is meritocratic (for example Nettle, 2003; Saunders, 1996; 2002), and by others to argue that it is not (for example Breen and Goldthorpe, 1999). I am not concerned here with whether Britain ‘is’ a meritocratic society, rather with the existence of a discourse of meritocracy which places people in positions of inequality *as if* that is entirely fair (Applebaum, 2005; Lister, 2006; McCoy and Major, 2007). Consider this from Young:

The business meritocracy is in vogue. If meritocrats believe, as more and more of them are encouraged to, that their advancement comes from their own merits, they can feel they deserve whatever they can get...The newcomers can actually believe they have morality on their side. (Young, *The Guardian*, 29 June 2001, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2001/jun/29/comment>)

Applebaum (2005) says much the same in her analysis of how the discourse of meritocracy in the USA works alongside discourses of ‘colour-blindness’

³ Meg Munn MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State May 2006-June 2007, speaking in March 2007 reported only 10.3% of all FTSE 100 Directorships were held by women (<http://www.communities.gov.uk/speeches/corporate/equality-boardroom>); Jessica Evans writing in *The Guardian*, 17 June 2008 reported women account for 38% of all UK academics on permanent contract, 14% of vice-chancellors, and 19% of professors (<http://education.guardian.co.uk/print/0,,335044317-108229,00.html>).

to obfuscate continued inequalities between racial and ethnic groups. Assumptions of success by ‘merit’ conceal the social and economic privileges some groups experience thus making ‘innocent bystanders’ out of them; the corollary is that those who fail to achieve should hold themselves responsible.

The moral message of individualised neoliberal meritocratic rhetoric is insidious. In Britain, Lister (2006) reports the findings of the Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU), a division of the Cabinet Office of the British Government, where it is argued that ‘meritocracy’ actually works to maintain *inequality* in that it generates a climate where it can be said that ‘the losers ...have no one to blame for their circumstances but their own lack of ability and commitment’ (PIU, cited in Lister, 2006:234). It is within this discursive climate that subjects are propelled into reflecting on and experiencing themselves as successful or failing subjects.

3.1.4. Critical engagements

A number of critiques are raised against the theory of the Foucauldian subject, and from a range of quarters, modernist and poststructuralist. I am concerned here only with those critiques committed to, or at least sympathetic to, the poststructural project.

Feminist scholars have engaged extensively with post-structuralism. Social feminism takes the anti-essentialism of post-structuralism as a means of countering homogenising accounts of ‘woman’. It provides a resistance to claims to universal core characteristics of ‘woman’ (Butler, 1990). (See also postcolonial critiques for alternative sources of anti-homogenising discourses: hooks,

1997[1984]; Mohanty, 1988). Approaching gender as a set of practices inscribed on the body, rather than the product of absolute sexual difference, opens up gender (and other) inequalities to critical and emancipatory examination and makes space for challenging and changing gendered practices (McNay, 1991).

However, some scholars criticise Foucault for being blind to gender, for failing to address the different ways institutions and technologies impact on women and men (McNay, 1991). In addition, other scholars argue the Foucauldian account neither presents, nor allows, an adequate theory of resistance (Billig, 1996). Thus, for some commentators, the Foucauldian subject is one represented as too *passively* sculpted by disciplinary practices. As McNay (1992) notes, this passivity challenges feminist emancipatory goals because of its anti-agentic implications. However, McNay (1992) suggests that while *early* Foucauldian writings did indeed construct a passive subject, in his later work, *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault, 1984) carried a different flavour. There, McNay says, ‘individuals are no longer conceived as docile bodies in the grip of an inexorable disciplinary power, but as self-determining agents who are capable of challenging and resisting the structures of domination in modern society’ (McNay, 1992:4).

Foucault’s reading of power is intensely complicated though. Power that resists, simultaneously confirms. The argument is this: power is exercised precisely because people do have choices; it is this quality which makes resistance possible. And because there is choice, power is inevitably exercised in every action. Every time a subject re-enacts a practice, the practice is re-empowered. However, resistance also implicitly maintains disciplinary powers in the sense that

to resist is to acknowledge, to confirm the thing resisted (Wetherell and Potter, 1992). To resist is to re-produce, to re-invigorate, the normativity of the organising framework being resisted.

The theoretical capacity for resistance is present in Foucault's writings, but what that resistance looks like in practice is not well documented. His attention was on the genealogy of practices, the history of how certain ways of knowing the world have come into being, rather than the everyday *doing* of *particular* practices. It lacks an attention to the ethnomethodologies of living – people's everyday ways of doing things (Garfinkel, 1967; Goffman, 1963; Sacks, 1995). But as Wetherell (1998) points out in her argument for a synthesis between Foucauldian genealogy and ethnomethodology, there is no inherent conflict between the macro Foucauldian account of the subject and the micro fine grained analysis of everyday practice typical of conversation analysis. There is however, a need for empirical elaboration through analysis at the local level. This critique still stands and I take up this point in section 3.2.

Finally, for some critics the central problem of Foucauldian thought is much more fundamental, in that it can appear to read not only the subject, but subjectivity – experience, emotion, investments, etc., through notions of discursive practices alone (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000a; 2000b). The argument here is that a complete focus on discursive practice leaves aside too much that is internally held in the psychic and bodily experiences of living. I return to this argument in section 3.3. below.

3.1.5. Summary

This section has outlined the Foucauldian framework for thinking about subjects and subjectivities formed in discourse. It has introduced some of the overarching contemporary themes of those discourses, the individualised, psychologised, self-regulating, neoliberal self. It has started to pick up on some of the challenges this presents for people embedded in these particular ways of making sense of the self, and some of the challenges for positioning the self in positive relations to discourses of success and failure. However, it has also pointed to some of the criticisms of this theory of the subject; most notably that the Foucauldian framework needs to be supplemented with a closer theory – and a more empirically grounded theory – of everyday discursive practices to help explain how these grand narratives are turned into lived lives as ‘successful’ or ‘failing’ subjects, how movements take place between different discourses, and how enactments of resistances and reproductions and re-workings are constituted. I take this up in the next section.

3.2. The dialogical subject: negotiated selves

This section shifts emphasis, moving from the macro Foucauldian narrative where discursive practices set out the broad frameworks for ways of doing social life; to looking more closely at how subjects work, moment to moment, with these discursive practices to generate and negotiate local meaning. In chapter 2, I outlined briefly the pressure for a paradigm shift in social psychology coming from theories of language as situated social action. This section looks a little more closely at this reading of language. It explains the performance of actions

such as thinking, arguing, positioning, resisting, and so on; and illustrates understandings of how subject ‘practices’ take on particular subject ‘meaning’, worked up in the moment.

3.2.1. Bakhtinian voices

The last two decades have seen growing references in social psychologies attentive to the constitutive nature of language, to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and colleagues Pavel Medvedev and Valentin Voloshinov.⁴ (For selected works see Holquist, 1981; Morris, 1994; Morson and Emerson, 1990). Bakhtinian texts deliver a number of concepts which provide valuable resources for thinking about talk of success and failure and how this is figured for subjects engaged in it.

Bakhtin (1981) argued that talk is formed in dialogic, intertextual, polyvocal flows (Maybin, 2001). So, when people work to make sense of themselves in talk, they do so through a multiplicity of intersecting competing possibilities. Taylor (1989, cited in Benwell and Stokoe, 2006:35) summarises this notion of the self as one that ‘exists only within ... webs of interlocation’. Some key concepts make this clearer.

The first of these is the contestable nature of language and meaning. For Bakhtin (1981), any utterance is ‘always half someone else’s’. Meaning is not under the sole control of the speaker, it must be negotiated with interlocutors. Moreover, meaning resides in large part in the uses words have already been put

⁴ There are ongoing debates about the authorship of several papers in the Bakhtinian corpus. Holquist (1981) favours primary authorship by Bakhtin; Morson and Emerson (1990) argue there is insufficient evidence for this position and favour retaining Voloshinov and Medvedev as the primary authors of the texts bearing their names. I follow this latter position. I refer generically to Bakhtinian texts, but to individual texts by individually named author. My reason is to indicate the particular texts in dispute; not to assert a position on authorship.

to in their historical but flexible sedimentations. To use words, then, is to join in with meanings which have been running for many years, but which are worked up anew for the particular moment and context (Maybin, 2001; Wetherell, 2003). Meanings carry historical usages, but these may compete, intersect, change.

In Bakhtinian writing this change is understood through notions of centripetal and centrifugal forces in language use. This goes some way to fleshing out the missing detail in Foucauldian arguments of resistance to dominant knowledge/power regimes. The Bakhtinian argument is that there is an ongoing struggle between the centralising – centripetal – force of language, the authoritative unified cultural canon such as religious dogma, scientific truths, ideologies, etc., pulling thinking and meaning towards a common currency; and the diversifying – centrifugal – force of language, where thinking and meaning stratify outwards around different groups, with different language habits, generating alternative versions (Bakhtin, 1981).⁵ Utterances are always inhabited by these forces, pulling meaning towards one or other direction. It is this tension which keeps language, and meaning, on the move (Maybin, 2001).

As these forces operate, language use settles into particular speech genres. These ‘genres’ are typical structures for particular sites and situations, patterns appropriate to conventions of time and place, such as the genre of the PhD thesis, the informal greeting with a neighbour, and so on.

This background of possibilities, the intersecting voices, texts, genres and ideologies in which we are immersed and through which we communicate and

⁵ Ideology here means a much more loosely defined notion of people’s view of the world rather than the structure of oppression in Marxist thought.

think, is captured in the Bakhtinian idea of heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1986): what Wertsch (1991) calls ‘the multivoicedness of meaning’. Each utterance is just one of many possibilities. Heteroglossia and multivoicedness are closely related to the notion of dialogicality, the idea that all meanings, all words and utterances, carry meaning only ever in relations with other words, utterances, meanings, and usages (Voloshinov, 1986). Language use assumes some shared meaning, but the listener/reader will orientate themselves to the utterance, draw on previous centripetal and centrifugal usage, and assume other meanings. Language use then, is an unavoidable collaboration: its meaning lies in interaction (Maybin, 1996).

These multi-voiced, dialogical, alterical meanings carry evaluative accents too, the judgements words carry for their object of reference. As Maybin (2001:65) writes: ‘language inevitably passes judgement on the world, even as it describes it’. This conception of the dynamic, dialogic, contestable and situated nature of language is particularly important for this study. These are resources for moving from the broad strokes of grand theories of the constitutive knowledge regimes and institutional discourses of Foucauldian thought, which are crucial for understanding the historical construction of the subject; through to an understanding of the mundane practices of language-in-use, which are crucial for articulating the contested search for meaning, and the beginnings of a *social* ‘interiority’. What this gives us is a sense of the moment to moment negotiated production language use entails.

While Bakhtin was writing primarily within literary scholarship, the same kind of heteroglossic thinking has been brought into social psychology through the work of Billig. For Billig (1991; 1996; *et al.*, 1988), this negotiated

production of meaning also takes the form of competing possibilities; what he describes as ideological dilemmas; the argumentative rhetoric of working with competing versions, through which thinking itself is made possible. I take up these readings now.

3.2.2. Subjects of ideology and dilemma

Within discourse studies in psychology, the notion of ideology has been broadened out from its classic Marxist reading where 'ideology' sits in opposition to 'truth'. Marxist 'ideology' refers to a set of ideas and practices which maintain the privilege of the current ruling class over subordinated classes as if that order were a 'natural' order. Subsequent reworkings of the concept of ideology are more diverse and have opened up some important new theoretical possibilities. Billig (1991) has retained the notion of the power of ideology to fix subjects in place, but coming from a social constructionist perspective he has argued against the opposition of ideology and 'truth' (see also Billig *et al.*, 1988). In Billig's account, ideology refers to all the collections of ideas people work with to make sense of the world, including everyday 'commonsense'.

Crucially though, these grand and mundane ideologies throw up contrasting and conflicting versions of the world, typified in deceptively simple tropes such as 'out of sight, out of mind' and 'absence makes the heart grow fonder'. This idea shares close similarities with the notion of interpretative repertoires outlined in chapter 2 (2.2). Billig (1996) argues it is precisely this variability and diversity which makes thinking possible. Thinking works through the argumentative organisation of competing ideologies, competing repertoires,

tropes, and so on. Everyday reasoning is made up of these argumentative possibilities, the dilemmas of choosing between conflicting, dissonant, ambiguous utterances. Negotiating meaning involves a rhetorical address to these alternatives.

Antaki (1994) argues against this rhetorical and dialogic stance, suggesting that attention to everyday talk reveals instead that speakers work towards agreement and to resolving dispute so that conversation may move on, and not as he says Billig implies, to sustain a battle of 'witcraft'. Billig's argument however, is not that every conversation is orientated to *as* a 'dispute'; rather, all talk is hearable as just one particular version, and therefore always open to challenge. This versioned nature of talk keeps meaning 'on the move'. Crucially though, talk settles into some familiar patterns which are received as 'truth'. This is the particular power of ideologies: they carry their power to shape the social world through the ways in which their familiarity is reproduced in talk. Ideologies are open to challenge, but their routine reproduction carries an implicit, fictional, authenticity. The contested 'truths' can not ultimately be resolved; and because of this, dominant versions may prevail (Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

Billig's development of a rhetorical psychology (1991; 1996; *et al.*, 1988) was derived outside of Bakhtinian work (Billig, 1996), but picked up many of the same themes discussed above; the dynamic, dialogic, anticipatory, ideological and negotiated qualities of language. Like Bakhtin, Billig has argued that what people say is assembled with a view to how it might be received: with an orientation to norms, to alternatives, to challenges and how might they be countered or forestalled (see also Potter and Wetherell, 1987). These norms include things like

norms against prejudice (Billig, 1991) which does not mean prejudice is ruled out, but that speakers must in particular contexts perform careful rhetorical acts to orientate themselves around a charge of breaching the norm (see also McAvoy, 2004, for a discussion of norms of rationality in talk of being lucky). What is produced, the talk or thought generated, is contingent, serving different purposes and fulfilling different functions at different times. Thinking about language through this lens of contingent argumentation, opens up an account for why talk may be, indeed could be *expected* to be, inconsistent and variable, and makes space for agency, albeit agency constrained by the building blocks of available discourse.

So far, I have traced a route between ideas of Foucauldian grand narratives acting on (possibly) passive bodies; to a Bakhtinian account which starts to theorise the slippage and moment to moment negotiation through dialogic language, making space for agency and shared, provisional, ownership of meaning through collaboration; then moving to the resources and discursive demands of competing ideologies. These resources provide a strong sense of subjects negotiating their movements through language. What is needed now, is a way to theorise that movement in practice. For this, we can turn to the notion of position and positioning.

3.2.3. Subjects, positions and trouble.

When people act, when we communicate, part of that task relies on being 'recognised' as a particular kind of speaking subject, speaking from a position within particular discourses. Speaking to or about others involves recognising

them too as other particular kinds of subjects within discourse. This concept of the centrality of ‘recognition’, along with the possibility for misrecognition, has its roots in Althusser’s (1971) claim that people are interpellated into particular subject positions in order to take part in social practices (Edley, 2001; Widdicombe, 1998). If one is to join in practices, one must have a recognisable identity through which to do so or one may be denied a voice. McFarquhar (1987) cites the example that until the 20th century married women in the UK were not recognised in law as persons with capacity to enter into contracts. As a consequence, they could not take up this position in a court of law to seek redress for contractual breach. This example, though, is quite formal in nature; clearly demarcated by explicit institutional – legal – discourse. Much of our everyday practice involves speaking from positions which are more subtle, nuanced and worked up in the interactional contingencies of the moment.

The Althusserian idea of interpellated subjects (Althusser, 1971) has been developed via the concepts of subjectification via discourse outlined above. Knowledge/power regimes, ideologies, talk, make available different ‘categories’ of subject which may be assigned, taken up, or resisted; slots such as the good parent, the unruly child, the criminal, the mad, etc. There are discursive ‘slots’ for people to place themselves and others in. This way of using the concept of location, of positioning subjects in social science, can be traced back to Hollway (1984) and her discussion of subjects taking up gendered positions in talk of heterosexual relations (van Langenhove and Harré, 1999:16). Since then, the elaboration of concepts of subject positions and positioning has been most closely associated with widely influential work by Davies and Harré (1990), Harré and

van Langenhove (1999) (see also Harré and Moghaddam, 2003); and more recently through the notion of troubled and untroubled positions developed by Wetherell (1998; 2005a).

An intrinsic feature of positioning is its dynamic quality; its fluidity. Positions are provisional. Subjects move, or are moved, between different 'classifications' of person as people talk and act. Davies and Harré (1990:52) contrast this with the earlier theories of lives practiced via 'roles' which they argue conjures illusions of transcendental, pre-existing, self-contained, static, dramaturgical models, with little room for agency. In contrast, thinking of subjects as constituted in positioning occurring in interactional moments, attends more carefully to the dynamic and fleeting multiplicities of self. Crucially, it offers an account of discontinuities of self, and contradictions in talk, as different discourses are mobilised, and different discursive 'locations' become possible (Edley, 2001; Reynolds 2004).

This taking up of a position may be reflexive, in that one positions oneself by one's utterances (although this notion carries tensions around intentionality which I discuss later); or interactive, in that one positions or is positioned by another. In addition, positions carry attendant 'rights, obligation and expectations' (Davies and Harré, 1990:52). Davies, Harré and colleagues understand these as 'local moral orders': the judgements and evaluations interlocutors bring to the interaction. Harré and van Langenhove (1999:6) make it the first of their key features for understanding local interaction. However, while 'moral order' is integral to this account of positioning, it is somewhat 'glossed over', both as an object of analysis and as an analytic resource. Empirically, it

misses an adequately multilayered analysis of ethnomethodological practices of positioning – how people *do* positioning in everyday talk. Taking up or being assigned a particular position brings with it access to wider discursive resources, particular storylines, repertoires, and so on, and it closes down others (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999). Moreover, this is not an abstract decontextualised process; it happens in contingent dialogical interactional moments. Jones (2003) provides much needed empirical illustrations of what that looks like in certain practices. She examines the way in which positioning women as ‘older’ allows them to speak authoritatively about what it is like to grow older. In contrast, positioning them as ‘old’ and ‘widowed’, makes it difficult for them to speak easily about being sexually active. Therefore one potential position may mobilise quite different sets of attendant and competing discourses for different interlocutors. Configurations of discursive positions, and movements between positions then becomes an important focus for analyses of contestation. This addresses one of the gaps of Foucauldian accounts: *how* ‘resistance’ happens in practice. Positioning is contingent on available discourses. It may pass unmarked because it draws on established, taken for granted spaces in discourses; or it may be contentious where positions are resisted.

An important resource for firming up both the notions of local moral order and the action of resistance comes in Wetherell’s explication of troubled and untroubled positions (1998; 2005a). ‘Trouble’ is marked out not by particular positions per se, but by particular ethnomethodological activity in positioning work; moments of hesitation and unease, corrections and repairs or retreats, confusion and conflict (Wetherell 2005a). Wetherell (1998) develops this through

an analysis of data generated with Nigel Edley for their project on masculinity (Edley and Wetherell, 1995). Similarly, Reynolds' (2004) study of women's discourses on being single explores some of the resources participants have for 'accounting' for being single. It is telling that this is a position which, in participants' orientations, *needs* to be accounted for. 'Single' signals trouble, in *some* positionings. Reynolds describes, in a delightful phrase, 'the dance of choice and chance' (2004:163) performed by her participants. While 'wanting to feel chosen' (for marriage) is orientated to as acceptable and not in need of being elaborated or countered, *not* having been chosen is more problematic. The claim that this is 'trouble' lies in the way in which not being chosen is countered by speakers as they position themselves as not wanting or needing to be married. But, this too appears to carry its own trouble. Speakers are now potentially positioning themselves as 'asexual spinsters', and positions are quickly further negotiated and realigned around the idea that it is a mistake to assume marriage suits everyone. These movements around trouble speak clearly both of difficulties around local moral orders, and the value of this close analysis to the interactional movements. Importantly, *untroubled* positions are equally interesting for what they show about the taken-for-granted reproductions of moral orders; those organisations which pass smoothly, without comment or delicate manoeuvres. One of the tasks for this thesis is to delve further into this concept of normative moral orders and explicate moral order practices, that is, moral order *in action* through attention to speakers' orientations to, and navigations through, trouble and absences of 'trouble'. I take up this point again in each of the empirical chapters as I consider what constructed sites and objects of success, and what

claims to success, require particular warranting, and what passes without dissent or apparent dilemma.

Subject positions and positioning are now central to Foucauldian accounts of subjectification and make a valuable resource to take forward. They are able to accommodate both the robust position, such as ‘legal personality in law’, and the more fleeting and precarious, such as ‘successful parent’ (Hollway, 2006; Lawler, 2000; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989). However, positioning theory requires greater empirical elaboration of some of its inferences and associated concepts. If the notion of dynamic subject positions is set within a framework that incorporates the knowledge/power/truth regimes of Foucault, with the dialogical fluidity and contestability Bakhtin points to, and the workings of ideology, dilemma and argumentative texture Billig makes visible; alongside the ethnomethodological notions of trouble Wetherell makes visible; *then* subject positioning takes on a complexity which makes it a powerful resource for analysing patterns of activity occurring in talk.

However, to present this synthesis in such a way does perform something of a sleight of hand. For some commentators, such as Billig (1996), the ‘subject’ of Foucauldian knowledge regimes and the subject of Bakhtinian heteroglossic dialogism are at odds: subject positions in Foucauldian knowledge regimes are more stable than a Bakhtinian account favours; and subject positions in a Bakhtinian account are more locally negotiable, precarious, and open to contest. However, some sort of synthesis of the two seems called for. A productive resolution appears to lie in the combined Foucauldian and ethnomethodological analyses Wetherell (1998; 2003) advocates. I will discuss this more in chapter 4

where I account for my analytic procedures; and where I raise an important critique by Jones (2003) on analytic claims to ‘intentionality’ in speakers’ positioning acts. For now, I want to turn attention to some particular aspects of Wetherell’s framework for understanding a psycho-discursive subject.

3.2.4. *Psycho-discursive practices: from grand theory to lived life.*

Understanding social psychology as psycho-discursive practice means understanding people as beings acquiring the ability to speak *as* psychological subjects, that is, to exercise contemporary narrative capital which, in our time and place, means the ability to speak of the self, of internal states, emotions, beliefs, and so on (Edwards, 1997; Wetherell, 2003; Wetherell and Edley, 1999). In Wetherell’s words:

‘Psycho-discursive practices are those which among the sum of social practices constitute a psychology, formulate a mental life and have consequences for the formation and representation of the person’.
(Wetherell, 2007:668)

Wetherell’s framework for working draws explicitly on Foucauldian concepts of socially constructed, discursively operating, institutional practices (Wetherell, 1998; 2007). The connections she makes between the constitution of ‘psychology’ and the ‘psychologised individual’ picks up the constructionist account of the psy complex outlined above (Wetherell and Edley, 1999). But, what Wetherell brings to theory and analysis is a closer focus on lived practice;

what grand narratives, ideologies, dilemmas, representations, look like when people are engaged with them, or by them; what people *do* with them; in other words, what psycho-discursive practices look like in action.

Within this framework of psycho-discursive practice Wetherell opens up a concept which is particularly important for this thesis; the notion of the ‘psychological capitals’ people draw on to construct and inhabit particular subject positions of success and failure and particular kinds of agentic and experiencing subjectivities of self (Wetherell, 2003; Wetherell and Edley, 1999). I will be revisiting these ideas throughout the empirical chapters.

In addition, Wetherell and Edley (1999) open up a further rich resource in their account of ‘imagined’ positions. They borrow the term ‘imaginary’ from Lacan, albeit in a more contained, empirically driven form. Lacan’s contention was that talk of the self means by necessity to identify with something outside of the self – with a pre-existing linguistic device, ‘I’, and therefore with something which is not the self, but an unsatisfying approximation (Redman, 2005). Talk of ‘I’ then strives to procure and protect the illusion of a complete and whole self, ‘I’, to match the sense of wholeness attached to the material image, the spectacle, of the unitary body. In Lacanian thought, the wholeness of this ‘I’ is a discursive fantasy, trying to suture mastery of the self in place (Redman, 2000).

Wetherell and Edley leave aside this ontology of being. They focus instead on what positions of ‘I’ look like in talk when people take up particular discourses of ‘I’ in relation to imagined, potentially available, subject positions. In their particular study of men negotiating hegemonic masculinities, for example, Wetherell and Edley suggest that men position themselves in relation to

discourses of an heroic ideal. But in this process, three discourses of contemporary masculinity are negotiated; the heroic ideal, the ordinary and the rebellious position. As speakers take up 'I', their talk imagines themselves and others as certain kinds of men, with certain kinds of psychological, privatised qualities and characteristics. As speakers imagine themselves in these locally occasioned actions they take up and reproduce socially available intelligibilities, the shared form of making sense of ways of being 'masculine'.

Wetherell and Edley have marked out an exciting concept full of potential but it needs more detail, theoretically and empirically. I will be coming back to the notion of 'imagining' in chapter 7. There I discuss my reading of my own data on women's talk of their own and others' successes and failings and the practices of imagining that go hand in hand with this and which carry telling implications for understanding subjectivities and identities.

3.2.5. *Summary*

This section has started to address a particular gap in the grand Foucauldian narrative by fleshing out some of the specificities of how subjects work with discourse in practice. It has illustrated some of the resources which connect the Foucauldian subject with the dialogical speaker. It has gathered a range of resources for understanding the way language works at the grand and the local level to create meaning. It has illustrated subjects as practitioners in dynamic negotiations, working with dialogical alterities, and oppositional forces; subjects working through ideological dilemmas, rhetorical thinking, and the taking up of consequential, implicatory, troubled and imaginary positions. These resources

extend the Foucauldian conceit that grand regimes of knowledge promote reflexive self regulation. They offer resources for understanding the way language use takes on particular and contestable meanings, and is inevitably dialogical, collaborative and therefore social and negotiated in action. The grand narrative has been focused a little more finely: the speaker is now consequential.

But, this individual is still somewhat elusive. Why does any particular person take up one particular meaning rather than another; why this subject position, rather than that; why attend to this discourse, rather than that; why invest in this discourse, rather than some other? In what way might an analysis of discourse, drawing on these intellectual resources, begin to account for what matters for any one individual. This is the focus for the next section.

3.3. Emotions, investments and individual specificities: a psychosocial province?

There are, of course, many theories of emotion in psychology, many perspectives from which to view them (see for example Griffiths, 1997; Laird, 2007; Roberts, 2003). However, in this thesis, I have been staking out a theoretical framework which is post-structuralist, anti-essentialist, and anti-humanist. As a consequence, my engagement is with those debates on emotion and agency and investments in talk which are within, or sympathetic to, a post-structural framework for thinking. Engagement then, is with contemporary moves in what is loosely called a psychosocial turn, although this is a contested phrase (Frosh and Baraitser; 2008; Hollway, 2004; Walkerdine, 2008). Psychosocial psychologies take many forms, as the inaugural meeting of the UK wide 'Psychosocial Network' in December

2007 testified (Hollway, 2008a⁶), and evidenced in the special issue of *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* from December, 2008. However, there do seem to be some important points of agreement which might run across all versions of the psychosocial: Hollway (2008a:200) suggests a minimal shared definition at least, that the psychosocial ‘does not reduce either to the individual or the social’. This allows a broad college.

However, in this section I am most interested in debate with those psychosocial approaches which whilst simultaneously sympathetic to a post-structuralist, constructionist stance, also speak on internal psychic worlds of emotions, investments, and individual specificities, in all their consistencies, variabilities, and contradictions. This version calls up a psychoanalytically inflected psychosocial framework: one still attentive to post-structural readings of the constructive and constitutive functioning of language, one that appreciates language as social action, but one which is reluctant to privilege language alone as the constitutive site of subjects and subjectivity (Hollway, 2004; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000a; 2000b; 2005a; 2005b; Frosh, 1989; 1997; 1999; Frosh and Emerson, 2005; Papadopoulos, 2008).

An important critique of the theoretical frameworks referenced earlier in this chapter is that they are absent of any adequate theory of personal investments in particular discursive figurations (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000a; 2000b; Jefferson, 2008; Frosh, 1999). As Jefferson puts it:

⁶ see also www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/psychosocial/contributors.shtml for a series of documents outlining different institutional approaches to psychosocial study.

Foucault ... is not psychosocial because his subjects are essentially the amalgam of the subject positions (in discourse) that they adopt; and Althusser is not because his subjects are interpellated (or hailed) by ideology but do not interpellate. (Jefferson, 2008: 368)

In other words, the personal, the 'psyche', is lost in this social account. There is some substance to this critique of early post-structuralist discourse analysis; but subsequent discursive studies have begun to develop responses. It is fair to say this is a project still in its early days, but there are important productive beginnings. In discourse studies emotions are examined as a particular kind of negotiable performance, such as Capps and Ochs (1995) on agoraphobia, and Edwards (1997; 1999) on talk of emotion as a functional interactional accomplishment. Wetherell and Edley's development of psycho-discursive practices discussed above also of course includes this dialogic interactional reading of the situated work of emotion (Wetherell, 2007; Wetherell and Edley, 1999). Billig's work on repression (1999a) and the practical skills of language also took him into the territory of emotion. He too argued against commonsense notions of emotion as reified distinguishable bodily states, and reframed emotions as social products, 'bound up with social relations, expectancies and a sense of moral order' (Billig 1999a:187). This is not to deny the senses of bodily 'agitation' or 'repose' which may be attached to some talk of emotion. It does, however, mark out the relational, interactional, function of talk of emotion; the way talk of love, or anger, is rarely a 'description'; but more generally, the conduct of relational moralities of validation, justification, criticism and so on.

These are negotiated practices (Billig, 1999a; Edwards, 1997). Moreover, these negotiated understandings of emotion are the very stuff from which we make sense of ourselves as persons experiencing emotion. So, it is not the case that discursive analyses entirely lack an approach to studying emotion and investment.

However, it is the case that for some scholars the style of this discursively led analysis is inadequate for the object of study. This tends to be the position taken by scholars working within a psychoanalytically inflected psychosocial framework (Frosh, 1989; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000a; 2000b; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989). In this framework the weight and consequence of the experience of internal emotions, experienced outside of any *talk* of emotions and investments, is a central object of analysis. Furthermore, it is something which, while mediated by language, is nevertheless held to lie beyond 'discourse'.

3.3.1. Behind and beyond words?

Frosh (1999) asks 'What is outside discourse?' In answer, by way of example, he writes powerfully of the dread of abjection, the loss of the self, shame, the eruption of shock, anxiety, terror, moments which can lie outside the constituency of language; experienced, but inarticulable. These are moments when what characterises language is its insufficiency. Such a moment may be rendered discursive retroactively, but 'at the time of its bursting forth, it is something else' (Frosh, 1999:386). There is a 'gap' for Frosh between 'experience' and 'narrative' (Frosh, 1989).

Frosh draws on enormously powerful and provocative imagery in constructing this gap and it is one which discourse studies in social psychology

must address. Cautiously, I propose that what Frosh points to in the ‘gap’, the insufficiency of language, is the *messiness* of language. Language is ‘inadequate’ in that it is fragmented and conflicting, not complete, or wholly ‘rational’, not always instantaneously available in fully ‘coherent’ worked up organisation. Language is worked up from competing versions. The moments of ‘inarticulable eruption’ are the moments when language is ‘in process’, ‘in competition’.

In another vein, Hollway and Jefferson (2005a; 2005b) ask about differences in people’s behaviours. They accuse Foucauldian approaches of a discourse determinism (2000b) which brackets off the lived life experience of the individual. They are interested in explaining why one person may respond in one way to a situation, while others may act quite differently. Their *interests* are intellectually stimulating; this is an enormously consequential area. But their *critique* is inattentive to differences in theories and analytic practices of discourse, collapsing the Foucauldian readings of the formation of the subject with some of the very different aims of discursive approaches in psychology. (I discuss these differences in discursive psychologies more in chapter 4). Moreover, Hollway and Jefferson’s own psychoanalytic resolution to the concerns they raise is highly contentious.

A useful vehicle for drawing out some of the detail of this debate comes in a recent dialogue between Hollway and Jefferson (2005a; 2005b) working from a psychoanalytic psychosocial position, Spears (2005) from a social identity theory position and Wetherell (2005b) from a psycho-discursive psychology. In their case study analysis of ‘Vince’, Hollway and Jefferson (2005a) describe a man who has worked as a lorry driver for 12 years. Some three or four years before

the interview takes place, Vince became embroiled in a lengthy and disputed insurance claim following the theft of his lorry. He was persuaded by his employer to commit perjury, and the employer's insurance claim was upheld. Sometime after the case was resolved Vince took sick leave and was subsequently diagnosed with depression. The research interviews (two, one week apart) take place 5 months into this sick leave period.

Hollway and Jefferson assert that the main puzzle is '*why did Vince go off sick as and when he did*' (2005b:175, emphasis in the original). For them, a straightforward account of physical exhaustion from years of hard work, long shifts, added to the strain of a lengthy court case, where Vince was bullied into lying, and where his employer had threatened to terminate Vince's contract, are all insufficient to account for why Vince might finally become ill some few months *after* the court case was resolved (Wetherell, 2005b). They describe this as a counter-intuitive puzzle and maintain that the answer must lie in unconscious defences. Their reasoning rests on the proposition that Vince's illness appeared to have no organic cause; they question Vince's motivation in not taking up alternative employment, and they target inconsistencies in the way Vince describes and positions his boss, and himself. Hollway and Jefferson contend:

'The fact that someone else would not have responded in quite this way forces us to posit an internal world... that is not simply reducible to social discourses, even though it can only be understood through, and in relation to, such discourses, i.e. psychosocially.' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2005b:175)

Speers (2005) and Wetherell (2005b) note that a substantial group of assumptions come together here: that Vince's behaviours are indeed 'unusual'; that this must be due to some inner psychic quality; that his actions cannot be made sense of in terms of discourse practice; that his illness has no straightforward biological origin; and that therefore, explanation must be by recourse to unconscious dynamic defence mechanisms.

In Hollway and Jefferson's analysis, the illness is translated into unconscious identifications. They begin by pointing to Vince's recruitment of discourses of the family man, one who can protect and provide (Gilmore, 1993, cited in Hollway and Jefferson 2005a). But they suggest this carries historical complications that are too painful for Vince to work with directly; his disidentification with his own 'wastrel' father; his idealisation of his boss as an alternative father – an identification which no longer works because of the boss's betrayal of Vince; an inability to admit this to himself; alongside the fear that he is no longer the father to his own children he had wanted himself to be. For Hollway and Jefferson, the analysis thus far could be worked up without recourse to unconscious internal self-directing dynamics. However, what points decisively to unconscious dynamics for them is twofold. First, is their conviction that Vince could quite simply have got another job, this is what they indicate to be entirely and practically possible. Second, that Vince became sick without an identified apparent organic cause. This sickness, they argue, indicates an unconscious 'choice' as an alternative resolution to dealing with his painful predicament.

Wetherell's (2005b) critique of this case study is damning. She presents a

brief but effective alternative analysis. This alternative analysis is not thoroughly worked up – that was not its function – but what is enormously significant about it is the way in which Wetherell is able, contrary to claims by Hollway and Jefferson, to point to the huge range of resources a discursive approach has available to account in great detail, great elaborate and empirically grounded detail, for what Vince says. Wetherell lists: troubled and contradictory identity positions; accounting practices; attributional work; local moral orders; narrative demands; acceptable subject positions for actual and imaginary audiences; multiple, practiced, and canonical story versions. There is nothing in Vince's talk that suggests irrational incoherence, even where his words show him to be multiply situated in competing and troubled subject positions. There is no requirement to go beyond the words to 'elective' illness. The processes in action here lie *in* the practices of language. There is nothing here which Hollway and Jefferson light upon which appears, for Wetherell, to go beyond the scope of a discursive analysis. So, with these resources in mind, and to revisit Frosh's question, what then, lies beyond discourse? What is the residual appeal of a psychoanalytically inflected poststructural theory of the subject?

For some, much of the appeal of the psychoanalytic comes in the radical work the notion of a dynamic unconscious does to undermine the 'modernist valorisation of the rational, unitary subject' (Stopford, 2004:15) and working within a poststructural framework I too am committed to this aim. Yet, discourse theory is much more massively disruptive of assumptions of a consistent, unified subject, positing as it does a fragmented, distributed subject produced in moment-to-moment situated and contingent practices (Wetherell *et al.* 2001a; 2001b).

As for the appeal of a dynamic unconscious, I am sympathetic to such an idea, or rather, to follow Hollway's (2008b) preference on this, to the idea of unconscious dynamics, a phrasing which directs attention to activity, rather than the more static notion of 'the unconscious'. However, I am suspicious in many ways of the systematisation in accounts of internal unconscious processes and the methods for accessing, identifying and validating accounts of these internal processes. Instead, I will be pointing later in my empirical chapters to an alternative route for thinking about unconscious action: Billig's (1997; 1999a) framework for thinking through a *dialogic* unconscious; that is, what gets made 'unconscious', through the workings of language; to what is said and not said, sayable and unsayable.

Wetherell (2003; 2005b) points to a range of concerns: the continuation of the split between the external (social) and the hidden, private, internal (the psychological) – despite claims to understand the two as irrevocably integrated; a tendency to overlook the discursive demands made by particular sites, be they interviews, therapy sessions, or some other accounting; also the ambiguously defined discrimination between eruptions of unconscious dynamics such as transference-countertransference, and routine interactional exchange *not* requiring explanations beyond the text. On this point, Edley (2006) argues psychoanalytic psychosocial analyses switch inevitably between language as representational and its functional or performative quality.

There are serious questions raised from within and without psychoanalysis around the transfer of clinical concepts to non-clinical settings. Frosh and Baraitser (2008) criticise Hollway and Jefferson for applying concepts intended to

be worked out over repeated therapeutic settings, with the therapeutic contract in mind, to just one or two interviews. They suggest that falling outside the therapeutic contract, these concepts might be expected to work in different ways. Hollway (2008b) agrees that theoretical purity may quite rightly be crucial for the clinical setting where the mental well-being of the patient is paramount; but in empirical research outside the clinic she argues it is entirely appropriate to borrow from these concepts to explore intersubjectivities. This is predicated primarily on the assumption that unconscious dynamics such as transference and countertransference are not restricted to the therapeutic encounter but are features of ordinary everyday practices. However, Frosh and Baraitser suggest that these radically different 'conditions of emergence' 'are so far removed from the analytic situation as to make their affiliation with psychoanalytic terminology strained and potentially misleading' (Frosh and Baraitser, 2008:362).

There is an irreconcilable dilemma here. The variability with which interlocutors approach *any* discursive task makes it hard to see what particular set of theorised unconscious processes should be privileged for any particular interaction. Neither Frosh nor Hollway circumvent the creative leap of reading 'behind' words to some presumed essentialist basis; which for Hollway is broadly a Kleinian reading of defences against anxiety (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a) and for Frosh (for example, Frosh, Phoenix, and Pattman, 2003), a merger between Kleinian and Lacanian strands of thought. Both are concerned not with what language is doing, but with what language tells us about speakers' underlying states of mind (Edley, 2006).

There is a direct conflict here for psychoanalysis and discursive

psychology. As Edley noted in his reanalysis of Gough's (2004) study of anxiety around homosexual masculinities, the underlying assumptions about the theory of language are incompatible: 'to some extent at least, psychoanalysis is predicated on the very model of language that discourse theory has served to destabilize' (Edley, 2006:604).

Does this then invite an antagonist stance, attentive only to ineluctable differences? This seems to be a wasteful option. Psychoanalytic psychosocial approaches and psycho-discursive approaches make valuable interlocutors for each other. This is precisely the approach modelled productively by colleagues Wetherell and Hollway for example. Similarly, Billig's re-working of Freudian repression, examining what discourse leaves, or makes, unsaid is an important demonstration of reworking an intellectual legacy to open up new theoretical possibilities (Billig, 1999a:8). I draw on both of these debates later.

Psychoanalytic readings have been critically attentive to ruptures, to inconsistencies and irrationalities; to subjects' commitments to and investments in particular patterns of being, to life history and continuities, emotion, and trouble, and so on. I value the attention a psychoanalytic psychology pays to such phenomena; and in particular to its attentiveness to a valid concern for the personal, for semiosis at the level of the individual. But for explanatory capital, I am more captivated by the stance that contends discourse analysis *does* have the capacity, albeit one in need of greater elaboration, to address all these (Taylor, 2006; Wetherell, 2007). I will return to this position throughout the remainder of the thesis engaging with notions of personal order, projection, repression, and investment, but within a framework of the discursive. All of these concepts are in

need of much more elaboration both theoretically and empirically. But this is precisely what makes contemporary developments in discourse studies in psychology exciting *and* fruitful. This, then, is the intellectual commitment going forward into the rest of the thesis – a discursive approach to psychology, grounded in combined macro and micro analyses of talk and text, attentive to trouble, eruptions, investment, and personal order; attentive to the take up of particular discourses, and to what is left out; attentive to the constitution of subjects, positions, subjectivities, and identities, to the constitutions of moral order in talk, as all of these are made visible when speakers negotiate their way through discourses of success and failure.

So, this brings me full circle to my starting point for the chapter: who are these ‘speakers’? Who are the ‘subjects’ who make up the participants in this study. The next section moves more closely to look at the different ways this group of women are located as particular kinds of people with particular kinds of ‘identities’.

3.4. Locating subjects: intersections of gender, age, and class

So far I have set up a particular framework for understanding the discursive formation of subjects, and their dialogic and intersubjective multiple locations in discursive positions. This section moves from these general debates to explore some of the specificities of these locations for this thesis. The construction of the sample here, women in mid-life, draws on two kinds of subject categorisations; gender and age. But I also want to consider a third, class, because of the way in

which class has been re-centred in some key social theory debates over the last ten years or so. Both gender and class have been introduced above (3.1), as critical sites. The notion of positioning subjects within such categories raises important questions about how these categories might be assigned, and be taken up in practice, and how multiplicities of identity categories might assemble, interact and dissolve. Therefore, I finish this section on ‘locating subjects’ with a discussion of recent debates on intersectionality – a concept intended to explicate these multiplicities of identifications, and the relational flows of power they entail, but a concept also which is problematic in what it can imply about the nature of identity categories and what this means for subjects.

3.4.1. Gender

Gender is one of the most privileged constructs for classifying subjects in western societies. We are gendered from the moment of birth, and with modern prenatal technologies, sometimes earlier (Butler, 1993).⁷ Poststructuralism has been taken up as a means of dismantling the taken for granted, naturalised, distinction between ‘woman’ and ‘man’. As McNay (1991) argues, the categories are mutable. Nevertheless, there is a pervasive practical deployment of gender as a primary meaning making construct.

Paradoxically, at the same time as gender is the most privileged of identifications; ‘woman’ is also rendered invisible. Haraway (1984, cited in Stainton Rogers, Stenner, Gleeson, and Stainton Rogers, 1995) noted, to be

⁷ There are a range of medicalised conditions such as Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome which may delay identification of sex at birth. Lawler (2008) suggests however that there continues to be a pressure to ‘fix’ gender at the earliest possible point sometimes leading to conflicts between assigned gender and later development of sex organs and hormone patterns.

‘woman’ and ‘female’ is to be marked out as something other; to be male requires no marking, it is the standard. This marking out has led to ‘woman’ being constructed as the deficient, deviant, ‘Other’ to the normative status ‘man’ (de Beauvoir, 1953). The extraordinary study by Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosencrantz and Vogel (1970) illustrated the almost impossible ambition for a woman to be identified as a ‘healthy adult’ amongst mental health practitioners, for example. Whilst the sets of criteria constructed to describe ‘healthy men’ and ‘healthy adults’ were similar, ‘healthy women’ were identified by a different set of criteria, aligned with constructions of ‘femininity’, rather than constructions of the healthy adult. Seem and Clark (2006) continue to find ‘healthy women’ differentiated from ‘healthy men’ in current counsellors-in-training.

Perversely though, as Bartky (1990), Skeggs (1997) and others have noted, contemporary constructions of successful femininity *also* produce a set of demands unachievable for most women (Bordo, 1993; Gullette, 2004; McRobbie, 2004; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001). In multiple ways, ‘woman’ is both a naturalised position, and one which cannot easily be inhabited successfully.

Gender invokes additional categories, or subject positions, beyond woman/man. For ‘woman’ it brings wife, mother, daughter, sister, friend, and so on. For ‘man’, husband, lover, father, brother, and more. These categories-in-use prescribe the relationships that ‘matter’ amongst contemporary ideologies and psy discourses, such as the regulation of wives, mothers, daughters (Hollway, 2006; Lawler, 2000; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989) compared to the much less visible attention to women as sisters, friends, and so on (Mauthner, 2002). In chapter 5 I consider the discursive practices of naturalising motherhood and

family as components in working up identities of successful womanhood, along with the 'absent space of the woman without children'. In chapter 8 I come back to the notion of sistering as a hidden practice in comparison with brotherhoods.

This section has pointed to the trouble and multiplicity of subjects, subjectivities and identities worked up in discourses of 'woman'. A particular site of trouble for contemporary women comes in ideologies of age; I address this now.

3.4.2. Age

Within the psychological literatures a common device for classifying people has been within biological age bands of life cycle models. These are designed to describe and account for particular behaviours and commitments at different stages of life. The focus on biological age brings with it assumptions that the stages are natural, unfolding across time in fixed sequences. Reynolds' (2004) review of life cycle literature notes that while biological models may make space for variations in cultural traditions, such as at what age people might be presumed ready for marriage or retirement and so on, the erroneous underlying assumption is that certain transition points will inevitably be negotiated regardless of cultural context.

Compatible with the arguments outlined above of the psy complex influences, these life cycle discourses are not only the discourse of psychological disciplines, but are common currency for people making everyday sense of themselves and their passage through life (Gergen, 1990; Reynolds, 2004). According to Gergen, the most commonly taught model is the eight stage

psychosocial theory of development across the lifespan proposed by Erikson (1963, 1968). This is a neo-Freudian account of linear, fixed, stages; albeit stages inevitably embedded in a socio-historical framework. Each stage is characterised by a central, normative crisis – a task which must be addressed, and which contributes to the unconscious build up of the ‘ego identity’. The resolution of each task sets characteristic traits of behaviour which will be carried forward as the starting points for subsequent life stages and life stage tasks. For example, in the context of this study, the years of middle adulthood are located in Erikson’s seventh stage. The claim is that this stage is inevitably characterised by the need to address conflicts between generativity versus stagnation; generativity being a libidinal investment in ‘establishing and guiding the next generation’ (Erikson, 1995[1963]: 240), and stagnation being a regressive and indulgent prioritisation of the self (*op. cit.*). The task, Erikson argues, is to establish a sense of oneself somewhere between these two poles.

Gergen suggests this model has passed beyond the classroom though and is currently the principle account underpinning the discourses most people (in the West) have available for making sense of who they are, what they are doing, and indeed, what they ‘should’ be doing at any given age/stage of their lives. Part of the research interest here is to explore whether these prescriptions of aging appear as an organising framework for women in mid-life talking about themselves and others in relation to concepts of success and failure; and what space is made for variability (Reynolds, 2004) and resistance to what Gergen (1990) presents as the oppressive function such biological models play in supporting prevailing structural and ideological constraints against enriching and expanding women’s

choices and opportunities.

Gullette (2004) shifts concern from psychological theories to a broader canvas. Middle-ageism is, she says, a toxic elephant in the room; one which puts us all in jeopardy if we fail to see it. She argues that youth operates as a form of capital and people are being resocialised 'to "recognize" themselves as "aging"', and therefore lacking capital, 'starting at ever younger ages' (Gullette, 2004:33). In the work place for instance, the aging worker becomes an 'ever more atomised individual, required to justify her or his value' within discursive configurations which are more and more ageist. Rutherford links this to the impact of the neoliberal discourse outlined above. Market ideologies of 'successful aging' promote:

an individualised response to the process of growing older. Manage your body, take responsibility for your health and invest for your retirement...'.
(Rutherford, 2007:137)

He points out this ignores the social economic inequalities that make this kind of 'personal self-help regime' beyond the reach of the great majority. But, deviation from the ideals of youth, or the *pursuit* of such ideals, not only positions women in midlife as bodily deficient, but also morally deficient, a particular kind of failing subject – one held accountable for lacking self discipline and appropriate self management (Bordo, 1993; Ogle and Damhorst, 2005).

There is an important paradox here. At the same time as women are interpellating into failing body positions, the privileged ideals of feminine identity

under late capitalism also insist women should be happy, confident and independent-minded (Ferreday, 2008). So, as the neoliberal discourse tells us we are not measuring up and could do better, it also tells us to be happy, secure, and confident in ourselves. This conflict prepares multiple dialogic, rhetorical, opportunities for confrontations with failing identities, or indeed for arguing multiple versions of successful identity. It is precisely these conflicting, contradictory dialogic confrontations which open up space for resistances. Ogle and Damhorst (2005) report women in their sample (age range 37-47) come to terms with age related bodily changes by re-defining cultural messages about what matters. What happens in these conflicting spaces, and the positional shifts made, is important for understanding figurations of identity and subjectivity available for 'ordinary', 'everyday', mid-life women, going about the everyday businesses of living, which of course includes composing particular subjectivities and identities. Broad cultural critiques are valuable, especially grounded in material objects; but what needs greater elaboration is a complementary empirical grounding of these arguments in everyday discursive practices. In what way are these ideological messages (re)produced in women's talk; what psycho-discursive practices are women calling on when they mobilise them, what flows of power are evident, what subject positions become available within them; which are taken up, which are resisted?

3.4.3. Class

Class is one of the more controversial topics in the social sciences (Kirk, 2007; Skeggs, 1997; 2004; Walkerdine, 2003). It has been a primary means of

structuring academic focus; has been displaced; and has been revitalised with renewed interest (Kirk, 2007).

Class is a moral domain, and as Walkerdine suggests, it always was: the term originated with the mapping of crime and disease with a view to managing populations (Walkerdine, 2003). But, the extent to which class inscribes a moralised organisation on subjects has been brought out with renewed force in recent years (Sayers, 2005; Skeggs, 1997; 2004; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001). A key point which unites much of this work is the way in which 'class' brings 'trouble' for identity, for subjectivity, and for access to practices and capitals. Skeggs, for example argues that to be working class means internalising 'intimate...knowledge of always not being "right"' (Skeggs, 1997:90). For Skeggs, the working class woman is always positioned as the inadequate Other to the middle classes. To be working class means always having to account for respectability, for not being 'good enough', for not being middle class, to seek self-improvement. The argument is a powerful one. There is a danger though, that this argument begins to reify class: it treats the middle class as unproblematically middle class; and unproblematically 'untroubled'. However, Lucey and Reay (2002) in their study of the pursuit of academic excellence as a means of producing middle classness, have indicated that this is not the case: doing 'being middle class' has its own arrangements of dilemmatic discursive formations. Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001:137) write of 'a powerful fear of failure ... operating within the middle class families'. Their study of middle class young women argues they too are beset by fears of not measuring up. Wrye's (2006) work on the unconscious saboteur presented in the previous

chapter also pointed to routine expressions of inadequacy by women with higher education degrees and working in professional careers typically associated with the middle class. Fearing inadequacy cannot simply be located according to divisions along class lines, then, but nevertheless, ‘doing class’ brings with it fear of failing the local moral order. Much more work is needed to explicate the practices and subjectivities of working and middle classness, and a recognition that class, whilst a powerful intersection in subjectivity, is itself in constant variable (re)production.

Giddens’ (1991) and Beck’s (1992) concept of the neoliberal subject (section 3.1.5) is entirely linked with claims about the demise of ties to class. What contemporary work does show however, is that class is still a hugely consequential signifying practice albeit in changing formations. Tyler (2008) writes of heightened class antagonisms; and Skeggs (2004) of an ‘underclass’, marked out as ‘waste’. Nunn and Biressi (2008) pull these points together in their review of media descriptions of ‘the undeserving poor’.

Constraints of space and time mean this is only the briefest gloss on class as a meaningful intersection for subjects’ talk of success and failure, but I will be returning briefly to class, and in particular to the ‘passing’ and ‘failing’ subject as that is made relevant in participant talk in chapter 7.

3.4.4. Intersectionality and multiplicity: category or practice?

Bringing these locations of gender, age, and class together is a complicated theoretical and methodological issue (Wetherell, 2005a). The ‘multiplicities of identity’ is a commonly stated quality of the post modern subject. This means

recognising that any one individual can be located within several different identity categories, or in Wetherell's (2005a) preferred term – I will come back to this shortly – located in different subject positions, such as gender, race, class, age, sexuality and so on. The concept of these multiple locations has been developed in much feminist work from the 1970s and 80s (McCall, 2005; Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006), but in recent years has come to be approached through the concept of intersectionality (Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006; Wetherell, 2005a; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

The term was introduced by Crenshaw (1989) to highlight interactions in gender and race in women's employment opportunities, and developed further as a critique of identity politics in her better known paper on violence against women (Crenshaw, 1991). It has since been taken up with some momentum, although it is not without its tensions.

Working with concepts of intersectionality means trying to understand how different identity categories, or subject positions, act together. How this might be theorised and approached in practice is contested (Burman, 2003; McCall, 2005; Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006; Wetherell, 2005a; Yuval-Davis, 2006). For McCall (2005) and Wetherell (2005a) much of this contest revolves around the 'starting point' for thinking about intersections: the notion of identity category.

Focus on categories risks treating categories as stable units which can be layered up, often in some kind of hierarchical level of impact: woman + working class = x. This risks reifying categories rather than approaching them as historically contingent (Yuval-Davis, 2006); it risks homogenising category

members and eliding differences within groups (Burman, 2003; Fernandes, 2003). Burman (2003) argues that intersectionality is precisely a way out of elisions of difference, by recognising that interactions between identity categories *change* identity locations. Yuval-Davis (2006) suggests categories be approached as locations on axes of difference. McCall's (2005) resolution is to offer three ways of thinking about intersections – anti-categorical, which is a deconstructivist approach, alert to reifications; inter-categorical, which explores differences between intersected groups; and intra-categorical, which explores differences within intersecting groups. Knapp (2005) suggests these last two are two sides of the same coin; thinking about what is inside or outside of one, can only be understood relationally in the context of what might lie inside or outside of another. How these approaches might be turned into method is more ambiguous and ultimately still tends to begin with the analyst's *a priori* concept of categories to be worked with.

Wetherell (2005a) proposes a different solution by advocating a 'bottom up' approach. Wetherell contends that beginning the study of intersectionality with identity categories is to begin 'in the wrong place'. This is primarily because this is not how people 'do' the business of invoking and working up identity 'slots' when they are doing the identity work that suffuses everyday practices (see Rampton 2006, for a discussion of the fluid, collaborative reformulation of identities worked up in adolescents talk with friends). An analytic focus on category neglects the intricacy of what happens when momentary, provisional, situated, positions are mobilised, when 'fragments of identity' are recruited, the subtle, or indeed rupturing positional shifts which take place as alternative identity

slots are worked up.

In this framework, what is needed is an analytic sensitivity to the different ways these intersecting, dynamic, fleeting, locations are mobilised, the practices by which they are recruited and the different functions they accomplish. I will be returning to this point in chapter 5 where I explore the working up of intersecting positions when women negotiate routes through discourses of being a mother and managing a career.

3.5. Chapter summary

The critique from the previous chapter highlighted the failure of conventional studies to recognise the nature of language as a site and tool of interested action. It presented the critique from the turn to language which argues compellingly that language is not neutral, and participants are subjects immersed in reflexive consequential interactional discursive practices, practices in which they have a stake.

In this chapter I have assembled arguments to show how these subjects are not simply *users* of language, but are subjects *produced* in language. This chapter has gathered some of the intellectual resources for thinking more closely about the formation of this subject, and the technologies and practices through which the subject is knowable, in constrained ways, to itself and to others. Language is a productive power, making subjects, and making ‘positions’ in relation to those subjects; positions which carry implications for what is available to some, and denied to others. Positions, then, are sites of trouble, power, and contestation.

A serious critique is posed by some: that this poststructural, Foucauldian,

dialogic, ideological, ethnomethodological understanding of the subject as a subject of language, is too limited an account; that while it may be rich and even compelling in its accounts of social constructions, it fails to explain *the experience* of these constructions – the emotions and investments that connect up with these subject-making, subjectivity-making, practices. In response, it presented arguments that it is precisely the complexity of intersecting discourses, intersecting ideologies, intersecting voices, which does indeed offer a route in to understanding these investments and the moral and emotive register through which they are formulated and performed. However, it agrees, that this understanding of intersecting discourses is still a project under development, in need of additional empirical elaboration. The rest of this thesis takes on some small portion of this project as it considers the discursive work and functional accomplishments participants enter into as they speak about themselves and others.

The research challenge is to explore *how* these grand meta-narratives of the successful self are taken up in the everyday practices of lived lives. What does the successful or failing neoliberal meritocratic subject look like? Are these in fact the discourses by which people constitute themselves? Or are there resistances to such constitution? Indeed, *what* constitutes success and failure, and for whom? What does this all look like empirically? These are key questions for the remaining chapters.

Chapter 4. Methods: accessing the making of meaning

The previous chapters have presented a theory of subjects and subjectivities as reflexive beings constituted in discourse, joining in social life discursively, and experiencing themselves discursively. The argument is that people make sense of themselves through the discursive resources they have available. They take up positions, negotiate meanings, work up identities in dialogic, ideological, argumentative deployments. This approach takes an action orientation to language: people do things with language; language does things with people. But it understands this notion of language action both as a quality of local interactional meaning making (Edwards and Potter, 1992), but meanings which are also embedded in the wider practices of subjectification (Foucault, 1961; 1973; Rose, 1996; 1999) and ideological debates and contests (Billig, 1996). This is the ‘synthetic’ position advocated by Wetherell (1998; 2003). It allows for an analytically rich exploration of constructions of subjects, subjectivities and identities, of success and failure for women in mid-life in Britain in the 21st century. This chapter provides an account and rationale for the methods chosen for accessing and analysing some of this ‘language action’ in talk of success and failure.

Section 4.1. explores some of the different approaches within discourse studies in social psychology and locates this thesis in a synthetic analytic framework attentive to notions of Foucauldian subjectification practices, ideological contests and ethnomethodology. 4.2. offers a rationale for generating

data by interview. 4.3 describes the processes by which participants were selected and recruited. 4.4. discusses the interview materials – the question schedule and the collection of photographs; and the conduct of the interviews. 4.5 addresses processes in analysis, beginning with issues around transcription, and processes of working up analyses. Throughout, I consider the ethical concerns encountered. Research decisions adhered to the code of conduct of the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the design was approved by the Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee (HPMEC) at the Open University.

4.1. Discourse studies in social psychology

This study is theoretically and methodologically underpinned by developments in discourse studies in social psychology (DSSP) (Antaki, 1988; 1994; Billig, 1991; 1996; 1999a; Billig *et al.*, 1988; Edwards, 1997; Edwards and Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 1998; 2003; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). Within DSSP the common project is to approach language as situated social action (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). This rules out language as a neutral mirror reflecting the world. Instead, language is the topic, not the resource. Language is not standing in for something; rather language is the constitutive site for analysis. Investigation attends to the social order in language-in-use, to the ethnomethods of lived lives, to the business that is done in language-in-use.

However, different interests have carved out different ways of framing and conducting the investigative project (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006; Wetherell, 1998; 2007; Wetherell *et al.*, 2001b; Wooffitt, 2005). Potter and Wetherell (1995a)

described this primarily as a difference between discursive practices – what actions are accomplished in talk, and discursive resources – what resources people have available, such as interpretative repertoires. They do though caution against treating the distinction too rigidly. Over recent years however, the division has become somewhat more polarised and more focused around ‘levels’ of analysis (Billig, 1999b; 1999c; Schegloff, 1999a; 1999b; Wetherell, 1998; 2005a; Wooffitt, 2005). One approach to the study of discourse, discursive psychology, continues to be influenced strongly by conversation analysis (CA) (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998; Schegloff, 1999a; 1999b). This has its roots in ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), the study of people’s everyday ways of doing things. It has been developed in psychology in the work of Edwards and Potter (1993), Edwards (1997; 2006), and Speer (2005) for example. Here, discursive psychology is a theory of language, rather than a theory of what it is to be a person. It is concerned with how people do the business of social life; manage accusations, justifications, stake, and so on. It focuses on the text, and participant orientation to the turn-taking. It is agnostic as to inner processes, and to experience. This has been a valuable strategy for building an understanding of patterns of interactional exchange. Kitzinger and Frith (1999) offer an excellent example from a feminist critical CA of the patterning of sexual refusals, for example. But, CA can be accused of too narrow a focus; that it brackets off and ignores the argumentative threads that weave a backcloth of interaction which is also a feature, albeit a broader example, of participant orientation (Wetherell, 1998).

A second approach takes up this broader frame of reference and this is the approach adopted for this study. The focus is again the study of language-in-use,

but attention lies with both the fine grained *micro* analysis of CA, and analysis of *macro* discursive formations, the historical narratives and ideologies running through talk, reproduced in the moment, and what Wetherell (2005a) calls the *meso* level, personal order and habits, the routine ways of sense making. Here, talk is understood to be embedded in a longer, broader body of discourse, extending beyond the interview and situated in a lived-life history and beyond. This approach aims to say something more about lived lives, about how minds are formed, about how ‘the internal’ works, how, and why certain patterns repeat; about what objects are constructed and constituted in language practices. It is illustrated in a broad range of work (see for example Billig, 1991; 1992; Reynolds 2004; Taylor, 2006; Wetherell, 1998; 2003; Wetherell and Edley, 1999; Wetherell and Potter 1992). This approach draws on the intellectual resources outlined in the previous chapter; the Foucauldian subject of knowledge regimes and practices, working with dialogic, heteroglossic voices, taking up multiplicities of shifting troubled and untroubled subject positions, reproducing the ideologies and argumentative threads which constitute the world. This forms the starting point for my analytic thinking in this thesis.

4.2. Generating data

The focus for study is women’s discursive resources for managing accounts of themselves and others in relation to concepts of success and failure. A crucial question concerned the broad notion of site. In terms of clarity of purpose and containing the scale of the project, there was a strong argument for selecting a single site, or social institution, where success and failure is made consequential

for participants. This might for example have been career promotions, educational achievements, relationship breakdowns, and so on. All, and many more of which, would have made valuable sites for investigation. However, a particular critique I have already raised in regard to existing literature is the *a priori* nomination by researchers of markers of success. Typically student participants are tested on academic achievement; outside of education adults are typically investigated for career or sporting successes, and so on. I specifically wanted to leave the participants in this study free to mark out their own arenas of success and failure and not be limited to one area I might prioritise. As a consequence I was reluctant to narrow down ‘site’. However, this also has consequences for deciding between ‘naturally occurring’ sources of data, or from researcher generated sources such as interviews (Potter and Wetherell, 1995; Taylor and Littleton, 2006).

There are reasonable claims that naturally occurring data are more ‘authentic’ for accessing the consequential ways people actually use language in everyday life in comparison to that generated by researcher constructed interviews (Potter and Hepburn, 2005; Taylor, 2001a). However, Gubrium and Holstein (2002:8) draw on Foucauldian notions of governmentality and the psy complex outlined in the previous chapter to suggest ‘the interview is one of the 20th century’s most distinctive technologies of the self’ (see also Atkinson and Silverman, 1997). From this position, the interview is familiar ethnomethodological territory, albeit another genre, and there is not such an unequivocal distinction between ‘naturally occurring’ and ‘researcher generated’ data as may be presupposed. Potter and Wetherell (1995a) suggests interview

data can make for entirely sensible analysis *if* the researchers' interventions are made just as material to the content as participants' responses, with both understood as situated contingent interaction. The interview is not the 'problem'; the problem would be the subsequent failure to take adequate account of the situated conversational interaction between researcher and researched (Wooffitt, 2005).

Nevertheless, reasonable concerns are expressed that interview data reflect the agenda of the researcher rather than participants' concerns (Schegloff, 1997), and in some ways this critique is inescapable. However, interviews are still interactional dialogic co-constructions of meaning which mobilise and negotiate shared resources for making sense: 'interviews are culturally rooted communication situations in which meanings are reinforced, challenged and negotiated between interlocutors' (Taylor and Littleton, 2006:28). Interviews are sites set up by the interviewer, but the resources interviewer and participants bring do show something of the meaning making resources available, and the pattern of deploying them, and orientations to trouble and dilemma. This can be enhanced by processes of 'active interviewing'. The active interview is one in which interviewers 'converse with respondents in such a way that alternative considerations are brought into play' (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995:17). As they point out, this presupposes participants who are not passively waiting to place the content of their cognitions on show; but who are active interlocutors engaged in moment to moment meaning making via the mobilisation of available discourses, ideologies, repertoires and so on. Potter and Wetherell (1995a) agree, suggesting that an interventionist and challenging approach to interviews is 'more

analytically revealing' (p.85). It facilitates a fuller deployment of repertoires and creates the opportunity for contrasting and contradictory themes and alternative accounts to emerge. Opening up discussion of the reactivity of interview interaction also helps to challenge the myth that 'passive' interviewing somehow brackets off the interviewer from co-constructions (Potter and Wetherell, 1995). The interviewer is always (re)actively present and a co-constructor to the text. The issue is what is made of that presence in analysis.

Talk of 'challenge' is not of course intended to suggest that the active interview is an excuse for bullying and coercion. Ethical reflexivity is an important feature of good research (Etherington, 2004; Finlay and Gough, 2003; Taylor, 2001a). It is particularly important when the topic at hand invites discussion of potentially 'delicate' topics such as this here, where participants are asked to take up positions of success or failure with all the 'trouble' that might entail. What is 'delicate' is a matter of local production, not a pre-given ontology. No topic is inevitably 'sensitive', and none can be held to be beyond sensitivities (Adler and Adler, 2002; Silverman, 1997). The researcher always owes a duty of anticipatory care to what *might* be delicate and I have sought to be attentive to this here. Consequently, active interviewing, that is, encouraging consideration of alternatives, is intended to be supportive rather than confrontational, invitational rather than insistent.

On balance, loosely structured interviewing promised to be an effective means for making space for variability to emerge in the way success and failure might be constructed by women. Moreover, while this carries some costs for examining situated consequential action, interviews do provoke different and

telling kinds of identity work as speakers reproduce and negotiate resources (Rampton, Harris, Georgakopoulou, Leung, Small and Dover, 2008). These kinds of productions are of particular interest for both the multilayered macro-micro analysis intended here, and the interest in contributing to current discursive and psychoanalytically inflected psychosocial debates running throughout this thesis.

4.3. Participants

4.3.1. Selection criteria: women in mid life.

The project was motivated in part by a desire to address the relative invisibility of women in mid-life in the psychological literatures. Therefore these were key criteria for selecting participants. However, what constitutes ‘mid-life’ is not clear cut. Dominant life cycle models suggest broadly 40-65 (Erikson, 1968; Levinson, 1968). Gullette (2004) however suggests contemporary women are encouraged to see themselves as aging at ever younger years. One interest then, was to see where women would site themselves in relation to this category of ‘mid-life’. The lower age limit was therefore flexible but anticipated a cut-off around 35. In the end, two participants were aged 34, and one further exception was made for a participant who took part in a paired interview (see below) and recruited her younger sister, aged 33 as her interview partner. The upper age of the sample was set at 59, locating all participants within ‘working age’ boundaries.⁸ Twenty four women participated, six in their 30s, eight in their 40s, ten in their 50s.

⁸ State pension entitlement ages have recently been increased for women born after 5 April 1950 but remain at 60 for women born before that.

4.3.2. Class: sampling ‘by proxy’ and ethical tensions

Previous literature suggests success and failure intersect with class to generate particular configurations of subjects in morally charged and consequential ways (Nunn and Biressi, 2008; Skeggs, 1997; 2004). Therefore, class was expected to be salient for the study. However, discourses of neoliberalism and meritocracy (see section 3.1.5) and changing discourses of class structures complicate *a priori* assumptions of class. To accommodate these concerns a plan was devised for sampling class by proxy markers of career status, education, and affluence.

However, this plan was subsequently complicated, appropriately, by ethical concerns. The early participants interviewed were volunteers from professional backgrounds or affluent locations. They might have been expected to have had readier access to a range of discursive resources for telling stories of success than some other participants. Quickly, however, these early interviews pointed to some of the trouble participants encountered when taking up positions of ‘success’. Reflecting on this raised serious concerns for participants targeted precisely because they might be *expected* to experience difficulty in telling a conventional, ‘passing’ story of success - women living in poor housing areas, or in low paid, low skilled jobs, etc.

The concern here is not that these accounts would be ‘flawed’ or ‘inadequate’. Quite the opposite. The approach to discourse used here is concerned with what people do and if that means hesitant speech and broken continuities, then that is appropriate for analysis. So, ‘trouble’ per se was not a problem. The concern was that participants were exposed to a high level of interrogatory risk – difficult for me to justify or feel comfortable with. It was my

conclusion that the interviews had at least the potential to act on participants in negative ways.

Given that the substantive empirical interests for the thesis were women in mid-life, constructions of success and failure, and theoretical debates on subjectification and identity, rather than a sustained examination of the social psychology of class, I decided not to seek out particular women to fulfil points on a class sampling matrix. My preference was to accept volunteers regardless of proxy class markers, and locate speakers retrospectively according to measures such as background, profession, affluence and so on, where these appeared relevant to analysis.

4.3.3. Recruitment

Poster advertisements (see Appendix A) were placed on notice boards in two office premises for health and social work professionals, two hair and beauty salons, one jewellery and craft shop, three community buildings housing a wide range of local community and voluntary groups, community action groups, self-help groups, support groups, etc. The advertisements in professional work places generated five contacts all of whom went on to participate, the salons two contacts, one went on to participate, the shop generated three contacts, one of whom went forward, and the community groups advertisements generated one response from a candidate participant in her early twenties, much younger than the boundaries set for the study. The remaining participants came from my approaches to people known to me whom I thought might be willing to take part, which recruited 10 participants, and asking people I knew to pass my details on to

others, which generated 11 further contacts, 7 of whom took part. In total, twenty four women were interviewed for the study. Eighteen were married or living with a partner, six were single at the time of interview, two of whom had never married. Twenty one of the women were mothers. All participants lived across a range of urban and rural districts, with varying degrees of affluence, in the north of England. All participants were British born and white. This ethnic dimension was not planned and ‘whiteness’ is not made a feature of the study. While there is some useful homogeneity amongst the sample, this does prevent analysis of any ethnic differences. Appendix C provides a demographic summary of participants.

Recruitment is not random then, nor can I make claims to representative sampling. However, there are claims to informative and consequential regularities across the 29 hours of interview recordings. As Potter and Wetherell (1987) argue, discourse analysis does not explain patterns in language-in-use in terms of individuals (or the number of individuals) with particular characteristics, even where it is attentive to settlements of life history. The focus is on the discursive practices. So, the aim here is not to make foolhardy generalisations about how all women in mid-life understand themselves in relation to concepts of success and failure; rather it is to explore what shared cultural discursive resources participants have available (Jones, 2003; Taylor, 2001a).

4.3.4. Allocation to solo or paired interviews

After initial information-giving discussions with candidate participants, all participants were offered the choice of completing the interview with the interviewer alone, or in a pair with a partner of their choice, such as a colleague or

friend. Two participants chose to recruit a second person to be interviewed with (one a friend for over ten years, one a sister); and four women I recruited separately knew of each others' involvement and chose to be interviewed together (one pair were work colleagues and friends for over ten years, one work colleagues for two years).

The decision to include paired interviews came out of the desire to encourage variability, diversity and elaboration in discursive practices and resources. Having participants who already knew each other in conversation together generated possibilities for a more active discussion, less dependence on researcher initiated talk, more shared understandings, and therefore more opportunities to examine the taken-for-granted, the untroubled, the troubled, and the marked, in action.

However, placing participants together to discuss potentially sensitive topics generated its own ethical concerns. Hence the invitation to participants to choose solo or paired interviewing, and more importantly, the control over choice of partner. A crucial concern for me as the instigator of these interviews was that the relationship between participants would be going on beyond the interview and therefore there was a duty of care to safeguard that relationship. This generated some notable differences across the interviews, particularly in regard to Holstein and Gubrium's (1995) concept of the 'active' interview discussed above. In solo interviews, participants might hint towards sensitive topics, and with care, these can be pursued by the interviewer. In paired interviews participants are exposed to more risk. Therefore as they take up positions, work up identities and negotiate dilemmas, it is less appropriate ethically to pursue topics which might present

participants to each other in 'difficult' ways. Additionally, the researcher has less control over the flow and direction of conversation in paired interviewing making this ethic of care more difficult and the emotional labour for all involved potentially much higher.

4.3.5. Consent

In line with the BPS code of conduct researchers should seek the informed consent of participants. The advertising poster (Appendix A) and initial conversations repeating information from that poster provided a starting point. In the week preceding the interview two copies of an information letter were sent to participants giving them more details about the study, its aims, the limits on the use of the data and participants' rights to withdraw (Appendix B). Prospective participants were informed all names would be changed to protect anonymity. were asked to sign one copy of the letter indicating they were happy to go ahead with the study, and asked to return it to me in a pre-paid envelope provided, either in advance or on the day of the interview. One copy was retained by participants to ensure they had full contact details. The day before interview I contacted participants again to confirm arrangements and answer any questions they raised. Three participants withdrew at this stage.

These practical activities, whilst adhering to BPS principles, disguise the complexity of seeking and giving informed consent. Participants were advised of the topic and some of the themes to be explored. But they may not have anticipated, just as I did not always anticipate, what topics would emerge during the interview as participants raised particular examples of success and failure.

The safeguard here, in line with BPS and HPMEC codes, was to remind participants before the interview and again at the end, of their right to withdraw any or all of their data up to the point of publication of any reports arising from the research, and to withdraw it from any further analysis at that point. Two participants contacted me in the week following their interviews to ask for specific sections to be removed from the recordings. This was done.

4.4. Interviews and interview materials

The twenty four participants were distributed across twenty interviews (four interviews were held in pairs). The procedures for solo and paired interviews were the same.

4.4.1. Interview materials

Interview materials comprised a semi structured schedule of questions (see Appendix D) and a series of photographic images (see Appendix E(1)).

The question schedule was composed of 10 lead questions with available prompts (see Appendix D). Questions covered the main markers and sites of success and failure which emerged from literature discussed in chapters 2 and 3: work/career, money/material possessions, relationships, appearance, being ‘good enough’, class influence, change across the lifespan, and looking back, whether participants might have wished for anything to have worked out differently. However an important consideration for this project was to allow the emergence of participants own markers of success and failure. Therefore, each discussion was researcher initiated with the broad question: *If you think about ideas of success and failure, what does that mean to you, either for you personally, or for*

other women you might think of. Subsequent discussion was largely participant led, guided by questions from the schedule when conversation faltered. These questions were usually in the form *What about x, is that something that matters to you in terms of success and failure?* Common additional prompts were: *Could you give me an example of that,* or *Could you say a bit more about that.* Questions were therefore not addressed in the same order for each participant. This approach capitalised on one of the benefits of interviewing, allowing conversation to flow, whilst also ensuring an address to some common themes across all the interviews (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

Three preliminary interviews (Cathy, Louisa and Sue-Ruth, Appendix D) indicated that the schedule worked well in eliciting rich talk of success and failure, and consequential concerns, particularly in participants talk of themselves and their own interests. However, the research interest extends to how participants position others in relation to success and failure. Two risks were identified here. The first was that leaving ‘other women’ open and unspecific, whilst allowing participants freedom of choice, also left participants with the problem of working out which ‘other women’ were appropriate choices for the discussion. The second risk, related to this, was that conversation might slide into abstract theorising about success and failure rather than talk of actual sites, actual others. To support discussion around concrete examples of other women, a series of 49 photographic images were collected, printed on 28 laminated cards (Appendix E(1)). Figures 1-5 below are examples.

All images were taken from internet databases and websites specifically stating the contents were available to use for educational and research purposes

Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online

Figure 1. JK Rowling, creator of Harry Potter, receiving an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Aberdeen, 6 July, 2006. Photo: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images. **Plate 5** in Appendix E(1).

without copyright infringements.⁹ With one exception (Figure 6 below) content consisted of different images of women; some celebrities, some public and private individuals, some anonymous, reflecting a range of employments, ages, classes and affluence. Images dated across the last 60 years which opportunistically coincided with the life span of the older participants. Some images were in colour, others black and white. Some were presented as individual plates, such as Figure 1. Others

were presented in combinations on one plate, such as Figures 2-5 below.

All were printed on laminated cards, and presented to the approximate scale and format as displayed in Appendix E(1) except that presentation images carried the figure text on the reverse of the image, not face side. Images were introduced towards the end of the schedule. Participants were told they might recognise some of the subjects as famous faces while others were unknown; and that there was a brief description on the reverse of each photograph. I asked participants to look through them in any order, and tell me about any of the photographs they found interesting in terms of how the images might relate to participants' ideas of success and failure and what a successful life looks like.

⁹ In line with fair use policies of the database sources for these images, photographs are shown with their original title as well as the description provided for participants where these differ.

Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online	Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online
Figure 2. Planting potatoes, 1957. Photo: Maeers/Fox Photos/Getty Images. Plate 2a in Appendix E(1).	Figure 3. Textile factory. Photo: George Freston/Fox Photos/Getty Images. Plate 2b in Appendix E(1).
Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online	Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online
Figure 4. Emptying the washing machine in a laundrette. (Original Title: Barbican Laundrette.) Photo: Mike awn/Evening Standard/Getty Images. Plate 2c in Appendix E(1).	Figure 5. A Soho prostitute waits for custom.(Original Title: Lady Of The Night.) Photo: Evening Standard/Getty Images. Plate 2d in Appendix E(1).

One further image, Figure 6 below, was included to encourage participants to reflect more directly on themselves. The image shows a kitten looking into a mirror and a lion reflected back. When participants selected this image for

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Figure 6. The cat or the lion.

<http://www.paloaltolions.org/Tails/TailsText.html>

comment I also asked *What do you see when you look in the mirror?* If they did not select it I drew attention to it and asked the question then.

Images were not presented in the same order every time. This is not considered to be a problem in that my interest here is not in the effects of a pseudo-experimental control of presentation order variables. Rather, attention is

on those discursive resources which follow the particular images, analysed for what they illustrate about participants' discursive strategies for making sense of themselves and others in relation to ideas around success and failure.

A point to note is that most participants appeared greatly engaged by the photographs. The images were not without 'trouble' for participants as they took up discursive positions in relation to them (see chapters 6 and 7 for more on this). Nevertheless, there appeared to be a change in style and register, one which generated what seemed to be a more easily negotiated, albeit highly productive discussion. This had the effect of moving discussions on from the sometimes intense reflexivity of the question schedule to what appeared to be easier territory in some ways. While this particular change in style and register has not been properly analysed in this study, it is worth noting that it appeared to fulfil a useful task not only in generating valuable data, but the change in register contributed a useful platform for preparing to exit the interviews.

In total, interviews generated 29 hours, 4 minutes, 54 seconds of talk,

ranging from 34 minutes 57 seconds, to 153 minutes, 53 seconds, with an average of around 87 minutes each (see Appendix D). Interviews were recorded using a Sanyo Digital Voice Recorder, ICR-B130, transferred to computer for copying to CD and access protected by password. Computer copies were then deleted for security reasons. CDs are stored securely when not in use.

4.4.2. Field notes

Detailed field notes were made in the period leading up to interviews and immediately afterwards. These were in the form of a private reflexive log which attempted to capture as much detail about the environment and feel of the interviews; the immediate location (usually the participants' homes, occasionally their work place) and the surrounding locality. I am ambivalent about the status of these notes. I am not using them as the kind of reflexive, transference-countertransference material treated as both data for analysis and part of the validation for analyses suggested by Hollway (1999). Rather, they are memory aids, reminding me of those things I attended to either at the time, or subsequently, so that I may reflect critically on the way in which those situated impressions may have continued over into my subsequent readings of the data. However, the *talk* forms the data, not the reflexive log.

4.5. Analytic procedures

4.5.1. Transcription

Transcription is treated here as part of the analytic process rather than something which precedes it (Taylor, 2001a). What gets recorded on the transcript, what

gets marked out, is an interpretative decision about what matters. Transcripts are only ever partial, and never neutral: the interests and assumptions of the research are embedded in the transformation of the recordings of 'language-in-use' into 'data for analysis'.

What form that transformation should take is contested. Some authorities suggest a pragmatic albeit ambiguous 'sufficient for the research purpose' (Cameron, 2001; Taylor, 2001a). Others recommend transcription should extend beyond the perceived needs of the researcher and research questions to identify and discriminate as many features as possible, rendering the data available for alternative readings from alternative theoretical or analytical commitments (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998; Potter, 1996; Potter and Hepburn, 2005; Wood and Kroger, 2000). Parker (2004) is suspicious of this approach for the tendency it displays to empiricist ideologies of data as achievable whole, objective, and real; and Hollway (2005) for the way it makes a fetish of written symbols which can only, at best, stand in for the actual object of study, interaction.

In addition, aiming to 'go beyond' the perceived needs of the research question and to provide as much detail as possible seems to me to invite the research process to be hijacked by endless analytic moves, all still unavoidably and inevitably partial, all only ever standing in for 'language-in-use' and all, as Potter and Wetherell (1995a) point out, quite likely to outrun the material resources of the research project.

Therefore, I have been guided by the choices outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1995a) who recognise both the value of more comprehensive transcripts for bringing out features such as audible aspirations which can be

shown to have interactional significance for participants, and the problem of the amount of research time absorbed by transcription. They suggest either closer reading of less material; or more sustained use of the audio record. I have opted for the latter. This was aided by having digital audio recording rather than tape: digital recording technology allows easy extraction of stretches of talk for close, repeated, attention, whilst simultaneously holding the extract in its original location within the interview as a whole.

Throughout analysis I have routinely moved between readings of the transcript, repeated listenings to the audio record, and reflections on the location of the fragment within the interaction as a whole, such as prior questions, prior mobilisations, etc. During this process the transcript was continuously amended and marked to reflect new hearings and new insights for coming to terms with the research questions at stake.

Generally, conventional orthographic representation was used to aid readability. This is on the assumption that, for this study, local accents and variation in pronunciation had no interpretative meaning for the research questions outlined in chapter 1; therefore ‘my’, for example, is not rendered ‘me’ (which creates its own confusions) or ‘mi’ (Cameron, 2001; Coates and Thornborrow, 1999). There were some exceptions to conventional spellings, such as when speakers use ironic pronunciations (‘channel’ for ‘Chanel’ perfume, for example). Expressions such as ‘gonna’ and ‘won’t’ are used in preference to transformations into ‘going to’ and ‘will not’. These choices may represent some inconsistency but the deciding factor throughout is to represent the flow of interaction, rather than the contentious habit of treating some accents as

unproblematic renderings of the spoken word, and others as markedly not (Cameron, 2001).

The conventional rules of punctuation were not adopted for transcription. Instead, the notation used is an adaptation of a reduced Jeffersonian system which aims for an intelligible compromise between readability and attention to interactional detail. For the most part I have relied largely on signalling pauses thus (.); overlapping speech by opening square brackets, [; emphasis by underlining; quieter speech marked at the start and finish by °; upward inflection by ↑; and a sharp break by an adjoining dash-. Unclear text is presented in brackets (thus) and comments in double brackets, ((*laughter*)). Omitted speech in extracts is identified by [...] together with a note of the length of the omitted sequence. A summary of all the notation used in the data extracts is provided in Appendix F.

All interviews were transcribed in full except for sections deleted from the audio recording at the request of two participants. I transcribed thirteen of the interviews myself; seven were given a ‘first pass’ orthographic transcription by a paid transcriber and then I corrected and annotated these further. All transcripts were then revised and corrected for interactional detail; pauses, overlapping speech, interjections such as mm, and so on and to indicate figure numbers and photographic content where speakers referred to the photographic images. All names were changed, and potentially identifying sequences (such as references to participants’ workplace, residence, etc.) were anonymised. Transcripts continued to be reworked for detail throughout analysis.

Reworking the transcripts means line numbers are always ‘on the move’.

What remains constant is the location of the talk within the audio recording as a whole. Therefore extracts presented in the text are located in the overall interview by time, for example [05:37/78.10] where the first figure 05:37 refers to the minutes and seconds into the recording where the extract starts, and the second figure 78:10 refers to the total length of the recording again in minutes and seconds. Line numbering on extracts begins at 1, except where a new extract is a direct continuation from the point a previous extract halted. In these instances numbering follows on from the previous extract.

On the extracts speakers are identified by names. I appear as Jean; participants are given pseudonyms. This raises questions about what might be inferred by naming. Billig (1999b) provides a valuable commentary here. Some conventions favour identifying speakers by sequential letters of the alphabet, or initial letters of names. Other possibilities include institutional role naming, such as interviewer, nurse, teacher. This is not appropriate for this study, even though participants could have been allocated such 'role' names, but these kinds of category memberships were not an analytic focus. Another alternative, the one selected here, is to allocate pseudonyms. But this too carries contextual pitfalls. Names usually indicate gender which brings implicit readings and can be used to suggest unintentional, or unwarranted claims to gendered patterns of talk. However, the participants in this study are recruited precisely because they are women so identifying them as women by the pseudonyms given is not itself a problem. However, it is not my intention to treat 'gender' as an analytic category despite my privileging of women participants. By this I mean that without comparative data from men I would risk reinforcing an uncritical gender dualism

(Stokoe and Smithson, 2001).¹⁰

In addition to gender, names carry further social meanings in their associations with class and age; Kylie, Guinevere, and Gladys are likely to conjure a variety of images for each us, different over time, class, and other locations. This is more problematic. The fictional character ‘Waynetta’ from the BBC comedy series *Harry Enfield and Chums* works as a comedy figure in part because of the work her name does as a means of classifying her as a member of the ‘undeserving poor’ (Nunn and Biressi, 2008). In my own study I became aware of selecting pseudonyms according to some unarticulated sense of ‘fit’, which is an unexplored subjectivity. I have been unable to locate a study which has examined the implicit meaning making researchers take on when they allocate pseudonyms in non random ways. Ultimately, despite some tangled reflections about what might be imported into those choices, I have opted for pseudonyms in order to more forcefully preserve the sense of speakers as ‘people’, with lives and life histories outside of the extracts. This area of pseudo-naming is nevertheless one which warrants much more attention.

For my own identification, I refer to myself by my name, Jean, in extracts. When my own talk is the subject of analysis I refer to myself as I. Rebecca Jones (2003) demonstrates an alternative approach, naming herself in transcription as

¹⁰ Speer (2005) makes a persuasive argument that gender is available as an legitimate focus for discourse analysis including locally focussed CA insofar as gender is invoked or orientated to by speakers. Certainly, the data here could profitably be explored for ‘doing gender’ in talk, such as participants’ comments about the (sometimes particular) responsibilities they face as women (see extract 19 on page 225 for example). However, whilst I do analyse speaker’s reproductions of and orientations to different subject positions such as housewife and mother in chapter 5, sister and daughter in chapter 8, I am not setting out to claim that these are ‘gendered’ ways of talking: this is a separate debate. Rather, I am interested in the positional ways of talking and the positional ideologies reproduced as language-in-use constitutes these positions. I still talk about women, then, but not to presume difference with men – rather to attend to what I have described in chapter 1 as an ‘invisible’ group.

Rebecca, but also analysing ‘Rebecca’s’ talk. This serves to dislocate Rebecca the interlocutor from Rebecca the researcher constructing analyses. I am sympathetic to the stated aim – to draw attention to the interviewer’s talk as integral for analysing interaction; but not persuaded by the discontinuity implied between interviewer, co-constructor of talk, and analyst. So, when I refer to my speech during analyses, it is as I, simultaneously co-constructor and researcher.

4.5.2. Working up analyses

The overall approach aims to take up the synthesis of Foucauldian and ethnomethodological analyses recommended by Wetherell (1998; 2003).

The transcription process explained above was an integral aspect of early analysis and provided familiarity with the broad patterns of talk and with finer detail of specific segments. From that point on, analysis was guided by a fundamental question: what work is this utterance doing. This is the guiding question from CA (Schegloff, 1997; Wetherell, 1998). In CA this is used to maintain a focus on the immediate local sequential order. For my broader analysis, I follow Wetherell (1998) to use it to guide my attention to both the micro focus and a much broader focus on what discourses are being mobilised, and what is not being said. I discuss a specific example of this in chapter 6.3.

I began by following Potter and Wetherell (1987) and copied different extracts into datafiles around common themes and topics. This includes the objects or events marked out as success and failure, the take up of particular identities, recurrent phrases and tropes, and so on. In addition I prepared datafiles for talk around the photographic images and cross references for concepts running

across particular sets of photographs. All of these involved an inclusive approach, allowing extracts to be copied into several datafiles. Points of interest were discourses in common, apparent shared meanings, variability in the way themes were deployed and, crucially, the work they appeared to do, and the debates and contests they appeared to index.

This process is revealing in further ways. As collections of extracts are examined, variabilities point to further potential patterns not initially recognised. Additional examples were then sought. This process allowed the data to ‘speak’ and to ‘surprise’ as new categories emerged, and new avenues of interpretative possibilities opened up. In addition, as the process of grouping and re-grouping developed, attention was also drawn to those segments of talk left unmarked. This provided an opportunity to discover other potential activity, or to set aside those segments of transcript as outside the particular interests of the research questions.

Following Wetherell (1998; 2003) I wanted to work with the data at both the close level, focusing on participants’ orientations, positionings and repositionings in particular segments, making connections to bigger patterns in the interviews as a whole, and with an analytic eye for argumentative threads and the troubled and untroubled recruitment of broader macro and ideological discourses.

This entailed checking for particular and repeating patterns of discursive resources and strategies *within* an interview, and checking the same against the shared resources and strategies exhibited *across* the collection of interviews. This was a recursive process. Close focus on short extracts dislocates meaning from

the longer interaction of the whole interview. Therefore provisional analytic interpretations were cross checked for coherence and consistency by reading extracts in relation to the overall interview and to the other interviews. This cross checking was carried out both against the transcript, and by re-listening to the audio recording. Continuing attention to the audio record was a crucial feature in analysis which needed to be repeated often. It quickly became apparent that there was considerable 'slippage' between what I 'heard' in the delivery of the talk as I read the transcript in silence, and what could be heard on the audio record when that was replayed alongside my developing interpretations. For example, a slight emphasis on the audio record could easily become magnified when reading the transcript if it had been marked 'emphasis'; equally a slight emphasis on the audio record not considered sufficient to mark out during initial transcription, might take on a new interpretative significance when it is heard later following more detailed knowledge of patterns across the interview as a whole.

Warranting analytic claims is a vital part of the research process. I discuss this more in the context of specific analytic segments in the empirical chapters to follow, but my emphasis draws on a range of tools. These include speakers' orientations, the exploration of diversity, coherence of the argument, the consideration of alternative interpretations and a reach for a scholarly analysis (Taylor, 2001b; Wetherell, 1998). My analysis also requires reflexivity as I indicated in chapter 1.2. I share much familiar territory with my participants, as a woman, in mid-life, and concerned with my own various self projects. Whilst this allows insights from shared cultural understandings, it also risks taking for granted those shared understandings. I have tried to address this throughout by

explaining my reasoning, pointing directly to those aspects of the interaction that underpin my reading, both in terms of the immediate local organisation and to the broader discursive resources mobilised within individual segments and across the corpus as a whole. I have cited at length, and often, from the interviews to allow readers opportunity to think about the legitimacy of my arguments.

Chapter 5. Negotiating successful selves and dilemmas of positioning

Chapter 3 presented a combined Foucauldian, Bakhtinian and psycho-discursive argument that the psychologised subject is one produced in discourse; produced through the ethnomethodological mobilisation and negotiation of particular ideological configurations and reflexive rhetorical sense-making; a subject drawing on, and answerable to, a heteroglossic milieu of situated, contingent, discursive possibilities and constraints. In particular, it argued that in Britain in the final decades of the 20th century and the first of the 21st century, this subject is psychologised and responsibilised through a combination of normative psy complex discourses linked with contemporary neoliberal governmentality. This combination, it is argued, promotes the individualisation of subjects through the notion of the self as a project to be worked on and experienced in particular ways. The subject is constructed as a site for self-regulation, self-management, and self-production (Walkerdine, 2003:241; see also Clarke, 2005; Clarke *et al.*, 2006; McRobbie, 2004; Rose, 1996; 1999; Skeggs, 1997).

Although my thesis picks up some of the extensive debates in social theory around individualisation, it does not follow them in detail. Instead, my interest develops from discursive and social psychological standpoints. In particular, following the critique outlined in chapter 3, I am interested in what this neoliberal individualised psychologisation looks like *in practice* when people take up discourses and work up particular subject positions, subjectivities and identities. The critique has suggested that this currently lacks adequate empirical

elaboration. This chapter starts to address this gap by developing more empirical illustration of these moments of subjectification as people take up particular discourses and construct particular personalised identities of contemporary successes and failures.

I begin in section 5.1 by presenting an extended extract from one interview as a way of previewing some of the key interests and concerns for this chapter and beyond, and showing the value of interview methodologies for capturing an abundance of consequential discursive action and semiotic patterns. In section 5.2 I raise a cautionary note about simplistic binaries of success and failure, and draw attention to shifting constructions of success and failure, multiple indexicalities and different ‘acts of translation’. The chapter then continues with an explication of some of the different ‘sites’ of success. By this I mean the objects, relationships, events, etc., that get marked out as successes and failures. This begins in section 5.3 with an illustration of participants’ talk of family and relationships as sites of success and continues in 5.4 with the ideological contests in discourses of a work-life balance, and the implications this carries for marking out identities of success and failure. Throughout I will be working with an analytic focus which is attentive to the social action and accomplishments evident in the immediate interaction, but which locates that work within broader patterns of contemporary social orders.

5.1. Capturing discursive phenomena

Underpinning this thesis is the notion that language is social action. But, any segment of discourse may constitute many different forms of action which

collapse together in the interactional moment. The extended extract presented in this section pulls out some of these many points of action. It introduces key topics in the research, and acts as a precursor to subsequent analysis where these different threads will be disentangled and explored separately. In addition, this longer extract helps illustrate the importance of approaching analyses of fleeting momentary interactions as something embedded in much longer histories; histories of the era, and of a life time of meaning-making resources, as well as the more immediate history of the interview interaction itself. This analytic eye for interactional histories beyond the immediate sequential utterances is of course a recurrent debate within discourse studies (Billig, 1999b; 1999c; Schegloff, 1999a; 1999b; Wetherell, 1998; Wooffitt, 2005). I broached this in chapter 4 (see page 124 ff.) but this extended extract helps illustrate some of the issues empirically.

This extract starts 2 minutes 29 seconds into a recording lasting for 124 minutes 46 seconds overall (the locations of all segments of talk are similarly identified at the start of each extract). The speakers are Paula, a participant in the study, and myself, Jean. Up to this point I have been reminding Paula that I am doing research for PhD study, that the interview is being recorded, and that if she wishes me to stop recording I will do so immediately. I have set some further context by saying I have been talking to women from our age-group – Paula and I were both in our mid-forties at the time of the interview – about their ideas of success and failure, and being good enough. I have said I am not focusing on any pre-set notion of success or failure; instead, I am interested in those things that matter to the women I am talking to, ‘what people feel resonates for them in their circumstances’. This preamble is typical of all the interviews. I continue:

Extract 1.

[2:29/124:46]

- 1 Jean so (.) as a general start (.) erm (.) if you think about that
2 phrase (.) success and failure
3 Paula mm
4 Jean erm (.) in (.) your own personal terms but also (.) or if you
5 prefer in broader (.) cultural terms
6 Paula mm
7 Jean what (.) what does it (.) bring to mind
8 Paula erm (.) well it's difficult for me because (.) I don't know if I
9 told you before when I was eighteen I was really ill (.)
10 Jean no (.) no
11 Paula oh didn't I tell you that (.) so (.) my life's like in two halves (.)
12 since I've been ill (.) and before I was ill
13 Jean yes
14 Paula and my mindset is completely different since I've been ill to
15 wh- to what it was before (.) and th- the everything re-
16 revolves around that (.) so (.) before I was ill (.) I just thought
17 I would be successful I think (.) I don't (.) y'know (.) I (.) I
18 was very positive
19 Jean [mm
20 Paula [and y'know nothing fazed me and then (.) I became really
21 really ill (.) I had something called Hodgkin's dis[ease

22	Jean	[oh yes
23	Paula	erm (.) but it was very severe (.) and it- I was a long ti::me (.)
24		erm (.) without it being diagnosed (.) and I had (.) a big lump
25		in my chest (.) that (.) crushed (.) my (.) was laying (.) closely
26		to my heart (.) and crushed my right lung I mean and I was (.)
27		I was really really really poorly (.) I mean I was very close (.)
28		to not being <u>here</u> (.)
29	Jean	mm
30	Paula	and erm (.) so I had to have chemotherapy for (that) eighteen
31		months (.) and (.) I was an absolute wreck (.) so for like (.)
32		and I was only eighteen and I mean and coming to terms with
33		that when you're eighteen is pretty horrendous because
34		eighteen is a difficult age group anyway isn't it
35	Jean	[yes
36	Paula	[you're not quite an adult and you're not really a child (.) and I
37		knew that I'd nearly died (.) and I was scared that I was going
38		to die (.)
39	Jean	mm
40	Paula	so I lived with that (.) I was an <u>absol<u>u</u>te</u> (.) physical and
41		emotional wreck (.) for (.) a lot of years (.) ten- ten years or
42		more (.) and there was nothing that (.) the doctors could do
43		for me because (.) they'd save my li::fe (.)
44	Jean	mm

- 45 Paula because I'd had all this chemotherapy (.) but the- it couldn't
46 make me that one step further to be well so I was always ill
47 (.) always something wrong with me never felt well (.)
48 couldn't sleep (.) I was in- in a terrible mess (.) and erm (.) so
49 (.) y'know when you've had something like that (.)
- 50 Jean mm
- 51 Paula it completely changes (.) where you're going in life
- 52 Jean yes
- 53 Paula y'know because before then (.) erm (.) I suppose even before
54 that before I was eighteen (.) it was in two halves (.) the first
55 half (.) I didn't really think about (.) being successful I didn't
56 real- because I'd (.) I'd had a very (.) erm (.) er (.) lovely (.)
57 family (.) upbringing where they really wrapped me in cotton
58 wool
- 59 Jean mm
- 60 Paula and (.) they'd had no expectations of me whatsoever (.) I
61 could be anything or do anything (.) y'know my mum and
62 dad (.) weren't (.) pushy (.) parents or anything (.) so (.)
63 y'know they they (.) they just loved me who I was so I
64 suppose (.) being successful or (.) or being a failure or
65 whatever never ever came into it because (.) I was so well
66 loved (.)
- 67 Jean [mm

- 68 Paula [I don't think (.) that ever came into it (.) erm (.) when I-
69 when I went to senior school I- I was (.) I mean I know it
70 sounds horrible but I was good at everything when I was at
71 senior school age (.) I just seemed to be (.) just seemed to fit
72 into the school and (.) everything I did was successful (.)
- 73 Jean mm
- 74 Paula y'know erm (.) everything (.) I-I (.) y'know everything I did
75 everything that I tried to do I was really successful at it (.) and
76 that is a nice place to be
- 77 Jean yes
- 78 Paula it's a really really nice place to be when (.) you do something
79 and people say (.) oh you- ah that was brilliant y'know (.) it
80 makes you feel really good inside but the downside of that is
81 (.) some people don't like you because of it (.)
- 82 Jean yes
- 83 Paula y'know (.) some people don't like you because (.) y'know
84 you've been successful in things (.) and I suppose (.) I really
85 erm (.) just I-I suppose I just thought I would be successful in
86 life whatever I wanted to be (.) erm and then I became ill (.)
87 and then I wondered if I'd have a life at all then so (.)
88 wondering about success or failure then didn't really come
89 into it until (.) I met a teacher (.) that I'd (.) had at school at
90 my secondary school (.) an::d this is quite a few years down

91		the line (.) and she said to me (.) what are <u>you</u> doing now (.)
92	Jean	mm
93	Paula	and I said (.) well (.) nothing really I said y'know I've had my
94		boys (.) now having my boys (.) to me (.) was (.) an im- (.) an
95		immense success (.) because (.) I was told when I'd had all the
96		(.) chemotherapy I wouldn't be able to have children
97	Jean	mm
98	Paula	so to be able to have children was (.) the most (.) incredible
99		thing that ever happened [to me in my life
100	Jean	[mm
101	Paula	so it was a <u>fantastic</u> success (.) but to <u>her</u> (.) who was in the
102		educational system (.) it wasn't
103	Jean	yeah
104	Paula	y'know (.) and she went ((<i>Paula gestures, makes a</i>
105		<i>contemptuous face</i>))
106	Jean	and she'd known you at (.) that earlier (.)
107	Paula	yes
108	Jean	spell [with all those expectations [of
109	Paula	[she knew me (.) [yes (.) yes she knew me
110		when I was (.) when I was [successful
111	Jean	[yeah
112	Paula	and I'd got such a lot of potential (.) and I- it really (.) cut me
113		up (.) and she said to me (.) what a waste (.)

- 114 Jean oh that-
- 115 Paula what a waste (.) and that (.) it re::ally really upset me (.)
- 116 Jean yeah
- 117 Paula because that- I mean I did feel like a failure then (.) because
- 118 in her eyes (.) I hadn't reached my potential
- 119 Jean mm
- 120 Paula but she didn't know what had happened (.) after I left school
- 121 she didn't know (.) the journey this most terrible journey that
- 122 I'd been on that just being alive (.) was a success for me
- 123 Jean mm
- 124 Paula and she didn't know that so (.) it really did upset me I mean I
- 125 didn't hold it against her because she just didn't know as far as
- 126 she was concerned (.) she was in the educational world and
- 127 she saw that I'd a lot of potential (.)
- 128 Jean mm
- 129 Paula and I hadn't (.) met that potential so she thought (.) it was a
- 130 waste that I'd wasted my life (.) and that (.) actually (.) and I
- 131 thought (.) °have I have I wasted my life y'know (.) have I (.)
- 132 perhaps I should've done something° (.) so that gave me the
- 133 motivation then (.) to prove to the rest of the world I suppose
- 134 (.) that (.) y'know (.) I could be successful in something
- 135 [that I did
- 136 Jean [mm (.)

- 137 Paula erm (.)
- 138 Jean did you feel that (.) that you were (.) it was for out there it
- 139 was
- 140 Paula for for for everybody else [not for me real- y'know
- 141 Jean [yeah
- 142 Paula to prove that so that if I was filling a form (.) I didn't have to
- 143 put housewife
- 144 Jean yeh
- 145 Paula y'know because that seems (.) really (.) derogatory (.)
- 146 Jean mm
- 147 Paula putting (.) oh she does the house work- oh (.) housewife
- 148 ((*dismissive gesture*))
- 149 Jean [yeah there is a just in front of it isn't there
- 150 Paula [but to me it was huge it was a huge thing (.) yeah (.) just a
- 151 housewife (.)
- 152 Jean yeah
- 153 Paula so (.) y'know that- that was really (.) that really motim-
- 154 motivated me (.) to think well I need to do something

I have presented a substantial extract here so before I do anything else, I want to explain why it is useful to have done so. In conversation a wide range of discursive strategies and resources are mobilised. Interpretative repertoires are called on, canonical narratives deployed, ideologies engaged and reproduced, dilemmas negotiated, subject positions taken up, or resisted, personal orders

worked up, trouble navigated, accounting, justifying, and warranting carried out, and so on. They interweave a tapestry of starts, stops, and overlaps, of indexical, contingent, references backwards and forwards, sometimes fleeting, sometimes sustained. We can see all of this in this one long extract. To analyse these different resources and strategies effectively we need to disentangle them and look at their workings separately and I do this later. But, to understand the power language exercises, the way it simultaneously holds subjects fixed as certain sorts of people at the same time as it shifts and relocates and reconfigures subject in different ways, we need to hang on to the embedded flow of intersubjective meaning-making, the kaleidoscope of both immediate and historical contingencies. It is for this reason I follow Wetherell (1998) and Billig (1999b; 1999c) in their debates with conversation analysts (see Schegloff, 1997; 1999a; 1999b; Wooffitt, 2005). Valuable, indeed crucial, explanatory insights are available from raising an analytic eye beyond the boundary of the immediate sequential interaction.

In the extract above for example, we can see how thoroughly Paula's narrative is embedded in multiple contexts. It is of course a direct response to the immediate interactional moment, in this instance my opening interview question (lines 1-2) which is embedded in the needs of the research project. There are other more interesting examples of this embedding though, such as when Paula checks with me about my prior knowledge: 'I don't know if I told you before' (line 8-9). Paula and I had met at an evening class and had fallen into casual conversation whilst waiting for classes to start. Our interview exchanges, and the intersubjective understandings and meaning-makings we produce are embedded in

this broader relationship, one preceding the interview and one, we probably assumed, continuing afterwards. But, our familiarity was limited, with only little knowledge of personal details, family circumstances or life histories.

Paula's comment, together with my implicit acceptance that there has indeed been a 'before', ties 'the past' to the present and quietly constructs expectations of a consistency with prior accounts. This is what Bourdieu referred to as the biographical illusion – a habituated expectancy of a constancy of self (Bourdieu, 1987). Drawing on the past in this way generates continuities and this sense of continuity is a key element of the analysis conducted here. I am not talking about 'actual' pasts as if there is a true version which can complement and supplement the data for analysis. However, *talk* of the past, talk that *invokes*, *produces* and *reproduces* pasts, is a central component of individualised psychologised selves. This is one of the main interests for this thesis: the production of particular subjectivities – how the grand narratives of 'the social' get taken up as 'the personal'; how particular discourses and ways of making sense come to be taken up and understood as personal histories, personal qualities, as qualities of 'the self'.

Organising such continuities of self are critical moments when subjects construct themselves as biographical, whole, and unified across time and life events despite apparent breaches in continuities (Taylor, 2003; 2006). This is how Gergen (1994) conceptualises the function of the self-narrative: an interactional resource in story form used 'to identity ourselves to others and to ourselves' (Gergen, 1994:247); it addresses a form of accounting which assembles, unifies, and explains the self. Paula's account illustrates these concepts of continuities so

well.

Paula's account here is of a life 'in two halves (.) since I've been ill (.) and before I was ill' (lines 11-12). This life 'in two halves' is used as a framework which organises the rest of the narrative. Through this account, Paula is unified as 'a self' in this moment of telling 'the life story'. This is a history of 'whats' and 'whys' and 'effects' which entwine early successes at school (lines 69-75), future potential and expectations of success (lines 85-86), interrupted by a fight for survival following illness (lines 86-87), then achieving the thought-to-be-impossible by becoming a mother (lines 93-101), but being called to account when an ex teacher asks 'what are you doing now' (line 91), being found inadequate (lines 113-115), with a potential left unrealised (118), prompting self questioning and a desire to redeem the self: "have I have I wasted my life y'know (.) have I (.) perhaps I should've done something° (.) so that gave me the motivation then (.) to prove to the rest of the world I suppose (.) that (.) y'know (.) I could be successful in something that I did' (lines 131-135).

In Gergen's terms the particular story form Paula reproduces here is of a heroic narrative; a series of advancements, set-backs, and further advancements. This is also a story which may have been told in more or less this way, many times. It is Paula's story, but it is also a story shape which pre-exists her in a canonical form (Bruner, 1990); a story of adversity overcome is a recognisable story form. Moreover, it is one Paula can recruit for the task my interview has set. The heroic story is itself a recognisable story of success: a contemporary story of challenges, battle scars, and victories. In telling this account Paula is 'doing success' in our exchange.

Paula's account assembles a range of familiar resources to build a storyline of adversity overcome, and personal development. It is an account which appears to flow readily, with a practiced, established quality. I say this because the extract shows how little work I do as the interviewer, beyond saying 'mm' and 'yes' frequently. 'Mm' and 'yes' are of course still co-constructing elements in the flow of interaction, elements which encourage the furtherance of the account. But, the contributions are unevenly distributed between speakers. This is Paula's story; this is her discursive ensemble, albeit one I can join in with.

Saying this account has a rehearsed and practiced quality is not a description intended to undermine the importance of the story, or the power of the life events it reports. Rather, as constructionist and discursive researchers have argued (Bruner, 1990; 2002; Gergen, 1994; Taylor, 2005; 2006), these substantial flowing narratives have an already-available quality to them, one which provides a framework for making sense, for organising the telling of a life. But, importantly, this is also a versatile resource. It is possible to see in this instance how Paula locates my interview question about the meaning of success and failure for her within this bigger account of the pattern of her life. These big, familiar accounts are recruited and reproduced as building blocks to fulfil new accounting demands. At the same time, this reproduction of a life history reinforces the construction of a continuous self, an individual with a personalised biography, a past, a present and a future, a self that is constructed as superseding the immediate relations in which it exists.

This concept of the reproduction of accumulated tellings of the self is how Taylor (2003; 2006) has addressed the critique of discursive psychology from, for

example, Crossley (2000). Crossley works within a narrative analysis framework and has argued that, with its focus on fragmentation, discourse analysis is inattentive to the continuities and coherences in the accounts people give of their lives and their experience of living their lives. Taylor (2003; 2006) has begun to address this directly by drawing on a range of resources from discursive psychology and understanding them as accumulations, accounts not worked up from scratch at any time of telling; but rather accounts of a life which draw on familiar, rehearsed, resources which have been worked to accomplish similar tasks previously and which are in any particular moment of telling, a new version of a familiar story. Moreover, for Taylor, this is the route in to understanding imaginings of *futures*, not simply pasts and presents. These repeated resources lay the groundwork for future tellings too.

The extract from the interview with Paula demonstrates an apparent ease with which participants across the corpus were able to give accounts of the self in response to questions of success and failure. Accounts were detailed, sometimes celebratory as in Paula's comment 'everything I did everything that I tried to do I was really successful at it (.) and that is a nice place to be...it's a really really nice place to be when (.) you do something and people say (.) oh you- ah that was brilliant y'know (.) it makes you feel really good inside' (lines 74-80).

Oftentimes though, accounts also signified trouble, such as Paula's first comment, 'well it's difficult for me' (line 8). This is a direct alert that the account to follow might not be a conventional story of success. Then, a different kind of trouble when Paula says, 'I know it sounds horrible but I was good at everything' (lines 69-70). This intriguingly indicates trouble around claiming success even

when it might be readily available. Some kinds of claims to success appear to be frowned upon – which hints at some trouble for participants in my study being invited to claim success.

In addition, this account which Paula and I worked up together, drew on and reproduced ideological dilemmas, such as the tensions demonstrated in extract 1 around being ‘just a housewife’ (lines 147-151). Indeed, this is something I contributed: I offered the ‘just’ (line 149) in response to Paula’s dilemma of a ‘wasted’ life (line 131 ff), and Paula takes it up: ‘yeah (.) just a housewife’ (lines 150-151). There is also an apparently unquestioned assumption of accountability here too; that one should consider oneself answerable ‘to the rest of the world’ in these terms; that one needs to find other ways ‘to prove to the rest of the world’ (line 133) that one ‘could be successful in something’ (line 134).

This ‘accountability’ implicitly constitutes notions that some subject positions are adequate, some will pass, and some are inadequate – yet again, more trouble. Indeed this concept of proving oneself to others hints at a theme which flows in a range of ways across the interviews; not only ‘what’ might pass as success and what might be failure, but *who decides*. Paula for example, orientates to success as meeting others’ expectations and judgements; most notably here the judgements of her ex-teacher. Her comment ‘I did feel like a failure then (.) because in her eyes (.) I hadn’t reached my potential’ (lines 117-118) is just one example. Paula recruits the imaginary voices of others against which she works up a particular moment of identity; in this case someone who has failed to measure up to the expectations of others. Paula is not alone in this practice. However, there are also interesting contrasts between this pattern of talk and that

from some other participants who are able to mobilise other discourses prioritising the satisfaction of their own expectations and wishes as a means of working up a particular (imagined) identity. I come back to all of these points later.

Taken all together, what this extended extract illustrates is the rich product of the interview methodology. It facilitates the mobilisation of resources and strategies and negotiations in several ways. These resources are inevitably contextualised by the particularities of the interview, but the interviews draw on a rich depth of culturally available resources and strategies. This tells us much about the cultural slots women are able to mobilise to both reproduce and address the tensions in identifying themselves as successful or failing subjects of contemporary times. The interview creates a particular kind of space to narrate a life, a self and a time. Contrary to claims by advocates of a 'pure' conversation analysis approach (see Wooffitt, 2005, for example), the combined micro-meso-macro analytic synthesis proposed by Wetherell (1998; 2005a) and favoured here in my analyses, offers a rich and grounded opportunity to explore the multiple intersecting layers of speakers' resources, and the difficulties to be negotiated in claiming particular kinds of identities and subjectivities.

This attention on the combination of both broad and fine-grained resources, and the interactional moments in which they are mobilised in practices, and the constitutive consequences for the making of individualised, psychologised subjects and subjectivities, firmly positions this thesis within social psychology. It is not a sociological account of a history of ideas; although throughout I do call on contemporary sociological descriptions of our times. My emphasis, however, is on the mobilisation of cultural resources for working up particular kinds of

selves; interpreted analytically through a critical lens orientated to the dialogical, the rhetorical, the argumentative, the persuasive.

5.2. Problematising a success-failure binary

In chapter 2 I argued that much of the traditional psychological literature on success and failure has displayed a taken-for-granted quality about what counts as ‘success’ or ‘failure’, with *a priori* emphases on academic attainment and career outcomes. By implication, success and failure are also routinely presented as a fairly straightforward binary. Indeed, many of the methods critiqued there guaranteed such a division by orchestrating participants into ‘success condition’ and ‘failure condition’ feedback tasks (for examples see Ensari and Miller, 2005; Stucke, 2003). But, when participants here talk about successes and failures it is frequently much more nuanced than that. There is much more of an argumentative texture to what gets marked out as success or failure. This was evident in the opening extract from the interview with Paula where she was in debate with herself about a ‘wasted life’ (page 157ff.). Talk of success may contain shadows of failure; and talk of failure may suggest what might be success. But, there is no simple algorithm here about what is success and what is failure. Nor, indeed, should it be expected that there would be – despite some of the traditions in the literatures in chapter 2.

There are several ways to problematise this indexing of success and failure, through multiple shifting sites, multiple shifting rhetoric, and multiple acts of interpretative translation. Different sites of success, family, career, etc., provide different contexts for different kinds of argumentative resources,

challenges and interpretations. What might be worked up as success or failure in one moment may shift in the next. Moreover, as Billig has demonstrated, the rhetorical nature of talk means there are multiple indexicalities in motion when discourses are deployed. In other words, there are many different meanings and associations which might be invoked by any utterance (Billig, 1997; 1999a; Taylor, 2001a).

Kulick (2005) has borrowed from Billig (1997; 1999a) to argue this through the notion of ‘dual indexicality’, saying that ‘utterances always simultaneously manifest their inversion’ (Kulick, 2005:622). While I agree in part, I am suspicious of any simplistic notion of ‘duality’; one which might assume given binaries and dichotomies and simple inversions. Language-in-use is indeed frequently dichotomous in the way it constitutes objects – woman/man, old/young, and of course success/failure, and so on. Indeed, one might imagine an apparent binary such as success and failure could be understood precisely through this idea of duality and inversion. But, these simple binaries, and the possible inversions invoked by the deployment of one or other, are frequently disrupted by ethnomethodological practices of argumentation and nuance. This point can be illustrated in relation to another concept; interpretative acts of ‘translation’.

I am asking women to talk about successful or failing subjects, and through the course of the interview I ask them to do this in relation to themselves, and to others. They recruit a wide range of resources to accomplish that, including a range of interpretative acts of translation. Put simply, in order for participants to undertake the task, they must try to work out what my questions

might mean. Participants invariably establish an interpretative frame for scaffolding their answers. This extract from the interview with Ruth illustrates a common frame for accomplishing this.

Extract 2.

[01:30/104:40]

- | | | |
|----|------|---|
| 1 | Jean | what do you think of (.) as success (.) if you were to think of |
| 2 | | that (.) what would it- what would it (.) mean to you |
| 3 | Ruth | a successful marriage |
| 4 | Jean | mm |
| 5 | Ruth | erm (.) mother? |
| 6 | Jean | yes |
| 7 | Ruth | or wife (.) |
| 8 | Jean | yeh |
| 9 | Ruth | they're my (.) y'know (.) they're the (.) they're the things that |
| 10 | | are important to me |

So, Ruth answers my question with some examples; marriage, mother, wife; these are typical across the corpus and I come back to them in some depth shortly. Here though I want to draw attention to the interpretative action in 'they're the things that are important to me' (lines 9-10). This is the frame Ruth is applying; this is how she is, here at least, interpreting my question, and setting provisional parameters to her response. This typifies the versioned texture which runs throughout the entire data. There are frequent similar acts of interpretative

translation throughout the corpus and I attend to them as we pass.

Here though, Ruth has translated my question about success into terms of ‘things that are important’. Perhaps the likely ‘inversion’ invoked here might be ‘unimportant’, perhaps much more so than ‘failure’, although this too is available. These dialogic interpretative resources appear then to index multiple alternatives. The interesting question raised now is what function a given selection might accomplish.

The particular translation here, ‘important’, fulfils a number of functions. Deploying the notion of ‘importance’ gives weight to those objects to which it is attached, in this case ‘a successful marriage’ (line 3), being a ‘mother’ (line 5), ‘wife’ (line 7). But, by marking these things out as important, Ruth is also, in Billig’s terms (1999a), simultaneously indexing and repressing those unspecified alternative objects she or someone else *might* have mentioned as successes, but that are now (for this moment) excluded from this designation ‘important’. So, by marking these things as success Ruth is simultaneously attending to other possibilities, side-stepping other more troubled responses, and working up a warrant for her own answer. But the argumentation goes further. There is also a qualifier here in Ruth’s use of ‘to me’ when she says ‘they’re the things that are important to me’ (lines 9-10). ‘To me’ works to take an ownership of the comments made; it claims the opinion expressed. This ‘personalises’ a speaker’s take on success, but it also helps inoculate her answer against dissent – should any be deployed – these are ‘her’ opinions. It points very clearly to the *potential* for different kinds of response. It announces other speakers may say something quite different.

With these caveats in mind, I am moving on to examine some of the shared patterns in constructions of success and failure as they appear across the interviews. I begin with the most dominant of these in my sample; the construction of family and relationship as a central, albeit troubled, measure of success.

5.3. Family and relationship

‘Could they say of me that mine was a successful life? I think so. I did not marry; I did not have children. That was my great achievement.’

So says Fay Weldon’s character Gabriella Sumpter in *The Rules of Life* (1987:10). It is a startling claim. Its power comes precisely from the way it subverts normative expectancies of successful womanhood – above all, marriage, and children. Twenty years ago, when Fay Weldon published that, her audience of readers may well have included the women in my study. They would, I think, have recognised Gabriella Sumpter’s contravention of a norm. Twenty years on, it seems that Gabriella’s position continues to function as a startling, defiant, resistance to the still present ‘rules’ of normativity. Amongst this sample of women, above all else, having children is repeatedly marked out as their greatest success, often along with their marriages – at least where marriage is marked out as enduring. This next extract illustrates this trend. At the start of this extract I have asked Mel what a successful life would be for her.

Extract 3.

[02:33/67:37]

- 1 Mel the most important (.) [thing (.) for me is family (.)
2 Jean [yeh
3 Mel that's never (.) never changed (.) I'm (.) I'm very fortunate (.)
4 I've (.) only ever been married once (.) twenty eight years I've
5 got two lovely children (.) that's it
6 Jean mm
7 Mel erm (.) and if everything else (.) stopped tomorrow Jean (.) it
8 wouldn't really bother me (.) I just (.) existed for my family

This appears to be an unequivocal response from Mel. Family is prioritised. More than that, though, there are also clear signs of the identity work Edwards (1998) describes when he talks about speakers deploying a discourse of ‘married with kids’ to construct not simply ‘facts’ but a particular understanding of themselves. When Mel says ‘I’ve (.) only ever been married once (.) twenty eight years I’ve got two lovely children’ (lines 4-5) this is not just ‘information’; this is an identity, an identity constructed around an abiding, enduring subject. This is not a momentary success; this is one constructed as having been lived out for twenty eight years.

This prioritising of family (line 1) as the most important success is a dominant discourse across the interviews. That prevalence does not mean this particular ideological stance is trouble free however. This idealising of ‘family’ as women’s greatest concern reproduces ideologies of ‘woman’, of successful and

proper womanhood. But, it carries contentious and conflicting ideological demands too. This was evident in the way Paula and I constructed 'housewife' as problematic in the first extract. Some of the tensions in taking up an identity in terms of one's family and relationships were marked out vividly there. I want to attend to this more closely now.

An intriguing sequence, and one I found moving during the analytic phases of this study, occurred where Paula recounted an incident from some years earlier (see lines 85-102 and 113-119). For convenience I have reproduced that segment of the extract here.

Extract 4.

[06:24/124:46]

- 85 Paula erm (.) just I-I suppose I just thought I would be successful in
86 life whatever I wanted to be (.) erm and then I became ill (.)
87 and then I wondered if I'd have a life at all then so (.)
88 wondering about success or failure then didn't really come
89 into it until (.) I met a teacher (.) that I'd (.) had at school at
90 my secondary school (.) an::d this is quite a few years down
91 the line (.) and she said to me (.) what are you doing now (.)
- 92 Jean mm
- 93 Paula and I said (.) well (.) nothing really I said y'know I've had my
94 boys (.) now having my boys (.) to me (.) was (.) an im- (.) an
95 immense success (.) because (.) I was told when I'd had all the

96		(.) chemotherapy I wouldn't be able to have children
97	Jean	mm
98	Paula	so to be able to have children was (.) the most (.) incredible
99		thing that ever happened [to me in my life
100	Jean	[mm
101	Paula	so it was a fant <u>astic</u> success (.) but to <u>her</u> (.) who was in the
102		educational system (.) it wasn't
		[...]
113	Paula	and I'd got such a lot of potential (.) and I- it really (.) cut me
114		up (.) and she said to me (.) what a waste (.)
115	Jean	oh that-
116	Paula	what a waste (.) and that (.) it re::ally really upset me (.)
117	Jean	<u>yeah</u>
118	Paula	because that- I mean I did feel like a failure then (.) because
119		in her eyes (.) I hadn't reached my potential

The thrust of the story appears to be that during a meeting with an old teacher, the teacher had asked Paula what she was ‘doing now’ (line 91). Paula tells me she responded ‘well (.) nothing really I said y’know I’ve had my boys’ (lines 93-94). Paula also tells me that the teacher’s reaction to this made her ‘feel like a failure’ (line 118). Paula elaborates by saying ‘because *in her eyes* (.) I hadn’t reached my potential’ (lines 118-119, my emphasis). But, if we look at Paula’s reported response to that question ‘what are you doing now’, it is *Paula* who says ‘nothing really’ (line 93). It is Paula who has been explaining that having children

following chemotherapy has been ‘incredible’ and ‘fantastic’ and it is easy to share that sense of celebration, as the interviewer, analyst, and perhaps reader too. But, when held to account in this reported story, Paula is incited in some way, some ideological, dialogical, dilemmatic way to position this remarkable achievement, and her life with her children since, as ‘well (.) nothing really’.

This fragment captures what appears to be an intense dilemma; reconciling a commitment to one’s children as ‘fantastic’, in Paula’s words, as ‘the most important thing’, in Mel’s words, with a contemporary position that this is somehow ‘inadequate’, or ‘insufficient’ on its own.

Most of the women in this study appear to manage this dilemma by constructing ‘family’ successes as a priority whilst also marking out their *potential* for claiming other successes too, often in career terms. In other words by activating more than one option, they inhabit both possibilities, albeit with one prioritised. The next extract illustrates this.

Extract 5.

[00:56/73:34]

- | | | |
|---|--------|---|
| 1 | Jean | so (.) at a very very general level (.) what do you think of (.) as |
| 2 | | success (.) for you (.) what is it |
| 3 | Rachel | it's a straightforward question for me and it may sound really |
| 4 | | daft because it's not (.) at a professional level (.) but it's actually |
| 5 | | having my three kids (.) |
| 6 | Jean | mm |
| 7 | Rachel | er somebody asked me (.) a friend of mine asked me (.) er (.) a |

8 couple of years ago (.) what had I achieved in my life (.) and
9 because I was actually going through a bit of a problem at work
10 at that stage (.) erm and she said well (.) you know what have
11 you achieved (.) thinking that I would turn round and say (.)
12 well all these students that had gone through their A levels
13 Jean yeah
14 Rachel and I just turned round I've had my three kids (.) and that was (.)
15 the biggest success in my life (.) I suppose

In this extract from the interview with Rachel, Rachel is able to simultaneously recruit two sites of success, professional and family. When she says ‘it may sound really daft because it's not (.) at a professional level (.) but it's actually having my three kids’ (lines 3-5), this works as a kind of ‘surprise’ device not uncommon across the interviews. It is possible to read Rachel’s words as ‘you might expect me to claim my career perhaps, and I could if I wanted to, but I am actually going to say it’s my children’. Rachel, in effect, mobilises both positions for herself, but in a more constrained manner than *directly* claiming both.

Also, claiming one’s children as one’s biggest success is marked out as ‘daft’ (line 4). Rachel’s talk is perhaps alert to ideological tensions. Furthermore, it suggests that participants are never themselves that clear about what might count as ‘success’ and an answer has to be worked up for the context and moment.

Both Paula and Rachel identify their children as their biggest success, but, it appears to work more easily for Rachel because she is able to do this in conjunction with other possibilities: she could claim something else as well.

Rachel mobilises the discursive resources here to surmount the diminished position of being ‘just a mother’ or ‘just a housewife’ in the terms Paula and I had used (see lines 142-151, page 160). However, in the process of doing this, in the moment of placing her children at the centre of her sense of a successful self and simultaneously configuring herself as a professional woman also, Rachel can be heard to reproduce (if not endorse) the normativity of motherhood *and* career, with implicit shadows of an ideologically diminished position of motherhood alone.

The point I am making here is that the women in this study appear to more easily sustain a discourse saying their children are their biggest success when they simultaneously mobilise *other* positions which they could also claim. If these other slots can be mobilised, women appear more free to select their children as their *primary* success. However, if like Paula, one is unable to mobilise other slots, if only this slot is available, it becomes a diminished position, one more difficult to sustain.

Let me go back to Mel who opened this section. Like other mothers in the sample, Mel presented her children as the most important thing for her when she reflects on the successes in her life. Unlike Paula, this appears to be trouble free in that the account is direct and receives little warranting. But I want to show what happened next. I pick up the extract from line 7:

Extract 6.

[02:50/67:37]

7 Mel erm (.) and if everything else (.) stopped tomorrow Jean (.) it

- 8 wouldn't really bother me (.) I just (.) existed for my family
- 9 Jean yeah
- 10 Mel the (.) job that I've got (.) was not a job I ever set out to do (.) I
- 11 (.) set out (.) seventeen years ago with ((*name of a national*
- 12 *organisation*)) thinking I will do a few hours (.) here and there
- 13 and it will fit very nicely round my children
- 14 Jean right
- 15 Mel and things happened (.) erm as they do (.) and I ended up in the
- 16 position that I'm (.) in today

Mel too, can and does claim family as her success. But Mel too, subtly mobilises other slots – 'everything else' (line 7). Downgrading the importance of 'everything else' as Mel does when she says 'if everything else (.) stopped tomorrow Jean (.) it wouldn't really bother me' (lines 7-8) works to underline her prioritisation of her children. But, once again, it makes visible some of the alternative slots Mel *could* have claimed, but did not.

There seems to be a normative order across the interviews that children will, or should, be prioritised in response to my questions about successes. But this appears to work best as a measure of personal success for participants when it exists as a companion option in combination with other success slots.

Before I move on to think more about some other ways in which this combined motherhood/career discourse might function, I want to think just a little more about the cultural norm of centralising motherhood for women's identities. It leaves a peculiarly 'absent space' – if that is not too much a contradiction in

terms – for women without children. Cathy marks this out directly in this next extract. At this point Cathy has been talking about women experiencing greater difficulty obtaining career promotions in comparison to men.

Extract 7.

[11:05/90:29]

- 1 Cathy we're not happy to put (.) twenty three year old women into
2 management because they'll go and have babies (.)
3 Jean mm
4 Cathy but then you're seen as odd if you don't want babies

This is a longstanding dialogical charge women are aware of, and if childless, one that can be difficult to navigate (Letherby and Williams, 1999; Letherby, 2002). I do not have children and indeed participants frequently checked this with me – usually shortly after they had started to tell me something about their own families. Therefore, I am potentially perhaps positioned by my participants as one of these 'odd' women. This may well have changed the kinds of things participants would say to me; or the kinds of expectations to shared knowledge they might make, but it did not prevent participants talking enthusiastically about their children as their greatest success.

This position of the 'childless oddity' is not one I have sufficient data to explore adequately. Only three of the participants did not have children. One of these three expressed an expectation that she still would; one, a possibility that she might; and the third, although I am not claiming this is equivalent, worked in child

protection services and talked at length about those successes which mattered most to her being the children she was able to help.

Understanding the particular identity negotiations of women without children will have to be a project for another time. However, I do just want to draw attention to one particular segment of talk which sheds some light on how centrally ‘successful womanhood’ can be tied to having children. This picks up from extract 2 where I spoke of acts of interpretative translation. I continue that extract here.

Extract 8.

[01:49/104:40]

- 9 Ruth they’re my (.) y’know (.) they’re the (.) they’re the things that
10 are important to me (.) at one time when I was younger it it
11 would have been a job (.)
- 12 Jean yeh
- 13 Ruth but erm it’s family life and people
- 14 Jean yeh (.) do you sai- (.) you said at one time (.) that’s that changed
15 (.) that sense of you has changed over time
- 16 Ruth it ha::s erm (.) I think when I was really young a career was
17 important (.) and then (.) er I had a change of direction (.) when
18 I met the love of my life ((*Ruth laughs*)) (.) erm (.) and so I
19 changed direction (.) erm (.) and then of course (.) when I had
20 my family (.) then (.) it was (.) y’know (.) family orientated and
21 they are the important things and still are the important things

22 (.) erm (.) whereas I think if someone's not had a family it may
 23 well (.) y'know erm (.) their- their impor::tant things of life
 24 might be (.) erm (.) career (.) y'know' (.) but yeh (.) as times (.)
 25 time does change (.) I think (.) your views on what's important
 26 and what's not important (.) do you understand where I'm
 27 coming from

What is intriguing here is what happens when I ask Ruth about her reference to things having 'changed over time' (line 15). Ruth tells me what changed was meeting 'the love of my life' (line 18). She adds 'and then of course (.) when I had my family (.) then (.) it was (.) y'know (.) family orientated and they are the important things and still are the important things' (lines 19-21). Her comment 'of course' (line 19), works to invoke a 'natural order' in what comes next: 'of course.... it was... family orientated'. That this is so much the case in Ruth's account is made clear when she concedes that it might be different for other women, for some women 'their impor::tant things of life might be (.) erm (.) career' (lines 23-24), – but only those without children, only those who have 'not had a family' (line 22). Ruth further reinforces an ideology of natural order here by constructing an implicit position of knowledge deficit for non-mothers, as those who perhaps 'understandably' cannot know better.

Interestingly though, in the light of the argument I presented above, even Ruth who constructs a natural order of family first, also reproduces alternative sites of success she *could* have called on. She tells us 'at one time when I was younger it it would have been a job' (lines 10-11), and 'when I was really young a

career was important' (lines 16-17); although notably this position is implicitly attributed to a naivety of youth, of pre-motherhood. Nevertheless, it is available to Ruth.

Ruth is able to prioritise 'family' as most important to her sense of success partly because she has reproduced this as natural, partly because she has worked up an identity of greater experience and clearer knowledge now; and partly because she has also mobilised other possibilities, the possibilities of a career.

Ruth was not in paid employment at the time of the interview; she had taken early retirement from nursing some years before. But, unlike Paula earlier, Ruth is not presenting herself as doing 'nothing really' in the way Paula reported. While this is partly because the two conversations proceeded differently – Paula reported being asked directly what she was doing and I did not ask Ruth precisely the same direct question – nevertheless there is a qualitative difference in the way the two women speak about being mothers at home. Ruth is not inviting a 'just a housewife' positioning. Instead, Ruth is positioning herself as doing the thing that is of most importance to her. This qualitative difference lies in part in making available other positions, of having strategies for calling up other positions and holding them in the wings. This strategic support makes Ruth's claims to success more tenable. But what is striking is that deploying such strategies reinforces the troubled position of mother/housewife as a claim to success. Despite the possibilities for recourse to 'natural order', ethnomethodologically, mother/housewife still appears to be a position which currently continues to require strategic support.

The position of 'housewife and mother' has been complicated as second

wave feminism destabilised and deconstructed stories of the family as the natural centrepiece for women's lives (Lucey, 2009). The participants in my study make very limited reference to changing political landscapes. Where they do this is generally more ambiguously through a reference to intergenerational differences in physical hardship and practical choice which I discuss later. Their talk nevertheless appears to reflect this feminist disruption to the interpellating discourses women must navigate if they are to work up accounts of themselves as particular kinds of succeeding or failing subjects. To be a housewife/mother is an identity which struggles now to pass, at the same time as 'good mothering' continues to occupy multiple agendas (Lawler, 2000; Marshall, Godfrey and Renfrew, 2007; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989).

These exchanges also shed light on another current debate raised in chapter 3; understanding intersectionality (see 3.4.4.). Intersectionality appeared in the social sciences literatures through Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) work on race and gender in employment. In its original form, intersectionality began with the notion of identity categories, so for me, this might be 'woman', 'white', 'working class', etc.; and the challenge was to explore the way these different 'identities' acted together on subjects. The critique however, has suggested that working with the notion of identity categories risks homogenising category members, for example 'women', and reifying them, for example 'middle-aged', rather than understanding them as historically contingent (Burman, 2003; Fernandes, 2003; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Wetherell's (2005a) proposed solution to this is to not begin analysis with the *a priori* identity categories in mind, but to explore the ethnomethodology of intersectionality: to examine how people 'do' intersecting

identities in everyday practices.

My analysis here, of speakers mobilising different subject positions, mother, wife, teacher, lover, career woman, younger, older, and so on, is an analysis of precisely this ethnomethodological practice of doing intersectionality as a response to ideological demands. To use Wetherell's terms, these 'fragments of identity' are on display here as 'the currency of practice', accomplishing the interactional accounting task set in the interview. Recruiting different subject positions, positioning and repositioning the self, as Mel and Ruth both do so well, allows them both to work up an effective accounting at the same time as claiming a particular kind of identity. Intersecting these positions in this way, functions as a kind of positioning 'capital'.

5.4. Work-life balance: ideological contests.

In the previous section I illustrated one of the more prevalent themes in talk in this study; family and children as these participants' greatest success. I argued that this discourse of being a mother was central to working up these women's identities as successful, but that on its own, there were hints of an orientation to this as an inadequate position. I suggested that taking up a subject position as both a mother and having a career seemed to offer a solution to a dilemma of adequacy. However, I want to show here that because of the dialogic, ideological, dilemmatic nature of discursive practice previously pointed to (Billig, 1991; 1996; *et al.*, 1988), this is a momentary solution only.

In this section I turn attention to a second theme which recurs across the interviews: this is a repertoire of managing a work-life balance; in particular, the

conflicting demands of combining motherhood and career. What was seen to work as a solution, can also function as an ideological dilemma as participants move through the shifting positions and demands of their accounts. There is a positional challenge in negotiating the right balance between family commitments and commitments to paid work, with a constant threat of failure in both. Amy, cited in this extract, captured this dilemma well.

Extract 9.

[02:27/82:39]

- | | | |
|----|------|--|
| 1 | Amy | well if y- (.) I've just read a book funnily enough (.) and (.) it's |
| 2 | | just a fiction book but it just totally broke it down if you're a |
| 3 | | stay at home mum (.) you have to explain to working parents |
| 4 | | why you stay at home |
| 5 | Jean | mm |
| 6 | Amy | and if you're a working parent you feel like you have to explain |
| 7 | | to the mums on the school gates (.) why you're not there or (.) |
| 8 | | you get the nursery phoning you up and (.) you know (.) |
| 9 | Jean | mm |
| 10 | Amy | can you possibly do this and can you do that and so you feel |
| 11 | | like you want to justify to everybody why you're doing it (.) |

This is a very familiar repertoire and it is not at all surprising to see it reproduced here. But, there are still a number of valuable points to make. Amy, in reporting these tensions, reproduces and re-energizes a position for women – that there is

always some threat of failure to fulfil perceived responsibilities, whether one is a 'stay at home mum' (line 3) or a 'working parent' (line 6). This is something that runs through many of the interviews here. What is more, this discourse from Amy reproduces an implicit accountability for this in the same manner as Paula's account earlier. Paula spoke of proving herself to 'the rest of the world' (line 133); that her need for success was driven by the expectations of others, 'for everybody else' (line 140). Similarly, Amy suggests 'you have to explain to working parents' (line 3), 'to the mums on the school gates' (line 7), 'the nursery' (line 8); so much so that 'you feel like you want to justify to everybody why you're doing it' (lines 10-11). Amy's recruitment of this discourse of accountability appears to be a vibrant illustration of the Foucauldian proposition that subjects are disciplined into practices of accountability and accounting.

What is also worth noting is what gets reproduced in Amy's resolution to the dilemmatic position she has mobilised. The extract continues:

Extract 10.

[02:52/82:39]

- | | | |
|----|------|--|
| 12 | Amy | but I (.) I think I'm very lucky (.) because (.) I (.) have a very |
| 13 | | good job (.) that gives us family time and (.) I only have to work |
| 14 | | part-time because my husband earns enough for me to work |
| 15 | | part-time |
| 16 | Jean | yes |
| 17 | Amy | so I can go to work three days a week and feel <u>no</u> guilt |
| 18 | | whatsoever (.) at leaving Ben in nursery because (.) he's happy |

- 19 he's secure he's educated (.)
- 20 Jean mm
- 21 Amy he's well looked after he's well fed (.) I get to go and be me (.)
- 22 for three days (.)
- 23 Jean yeah
- 24 Amy and then I can come home and be a mum (.) for four (.) but (.)
- 25 it's when they're poorly that you feel guilty (.) but (.) if they're
- 26 not poorly (.) nine times out of ten y'know they'll go to nursery
- 27 and I don't feel guilt (.) I refuse to feel guilt and I consider that a
- 28 level of (.) success for me whether somebody would look at that
- 29 and say well actually you haven't got the best job in the world
- 30 or (.)
- 31 Jean mm
- 32 Amy y'know you do leave your son (.) or (.) you do let him eat
- 33 chocolate or you do let him watch telly ((*laughs*)) or whether
- 34 they consider that successful (.) I'm not going to justify myself
- 35 (.) I (.) have reached a level that I'm happy at
- 36 Jean yeh

Lucey (2009) argued that 1970s and 1980s feminisms tore apart reassuring stories of the family as a natural, heterosexual, haven of societal success. But, as I have already demonstrated, this does not mean these reassuring stories no longer circulate. Amy initially mobilises one such story in this extract to address the dilemma of being a mother working outside the home (lines 12-15). However, it

is an account which goes on to resonate with dialogic trouble.

Amy's opening, 'I think I'm very lucky' is an immediate alert that something to follow is to be positioned as valued. I have argued elsewhere (McAvoy, 2004) that taking up a position of 'being lucky' is a rhetorical, strategic, identity practice, rather than a cognitive attributional practice. This is a social action, not evidence of a private cognitive action. The literatures reviewed in chapter 2 interpret this kind of 'being lucky' comment through concepts of causality, understood through dimensions such as site and stability (Heider, 1958; Weiner, 1971; 1985). So, for example, an attribution might be said to be external or internal to the person; stable or unstable, controllable and so on. Outcomes attributed to luck have traditionally been understood as external, unstable, and uncontrollable (Weiner *et al.*, 1971). However, the vibrant discursive critique of such attributional readings (Antaki, 1994; Edwards, 1997; Edwards and Potter, 1992; Locke, 2004) undermines this simplistic approach to language as representation of a pre-existing internal cognitive state. Instead, it re-focuses the language of attribution as socially contingent action.

This action of positioning one self as 'lucky' now takes on very different qualities. Here, Amy is able to mobilise 'being lucky' to set up what follows in a positive light; 'luck' casts what follows as valued, as good fortune, as a happy solution to the dilemma she has previously outlined. What follows is the reproduction of the 'heteronormative haven'. The content of this valuable commodity is presented as a mix of 'a very good job', 'family time', 'part-time' work, and a husband who 'earns enough' for this.

But, at the same time as this case is being made, it begins to slip. It is a

contestable argument, and Amy mobilises that contest. Her statement, that she 'can go to work three days a week and feel no guilt whatsoever' (lines 17-18), indexes the argument that this *is* something one might feel guilty about. This is even more apparent later when Amy repeats 'I don't feel guilt (.) I refuse to feel guilt' (line 27). Again drawing on Billig's understanding of the functioning of ideological dilemmas (Billig, 1991; 1996; 1999a) it is apparent that at the moment these resources are recruited to repress a possible charge of guilt, they simultaneously index and reproduce an ideology that suggests Amy *should* feel guilt. So too, at the same time as Amy marks this out as a 'level of (.) success' (line 28) there is an alternative dialogic space to recognise herself as potentially failing in standards of mothering. Amy reproduces a selection of some of these standards as she constructs for me an image of her son: 'happy... secure...educated...well looked after... well fed' (lines 18-21). This list marks out some of those items which Amy orientates to as criteria against which she may be judged. These are ones she presents as 'achieved'. A few lines later though she changes 'footing', to borrow Goffman's (2001[1981]) term, and constructs charges a generalised 'somebody' might make against her: 'you do leave your son (.) or (.) you do let him eat chocolate or you do let him watch telly' (lines 32-33). This imagined, potential positioning as a 'bad mother' is one Amy is simultaneously resisting and advancing.

In this extract Amy twice broaches the question of whether other people would accept her claim to success. Her response is 'I'm not going to justify myself (.) I (.) have reached a level that I'm happy at' (lines 34-35). This statement is fascinating. As with 'I refuse to feel guilt' earlier, 'I'm not going to

justify myself' raises precisely the notion that perhaps this stance might require justification. Indeed, Amy has very carefully been elaborating her position in a way which could well be described as justification, having constructed a family life around 'a very good job (.) that gives us family time' (lines 12-13) and a husband who 'earns enough for me to work part-time' (lines 14-15); and having described her son as 'happy', 'secure', 'educated', 'well looked after' and 'well fed'. Coming here though, 'I'm not going to justify myself' functions to provisionally close what is otherwise an infinite, unwinnable debate and temporarily blocks actual or imagined interrogation. But, the contestability that Amy has been working with is the very thing that prevents this closing becoming fixed and final. It is this contestability which keeps speakers caught in this precarious, shifting, accountable, position of the succeeding/failing mother.

5.5. Chapter summary

So far, I have shown what a rich resource the interviews are for exploring consequential discursive action around taking up positions of success and failure, the identity work taking place, and some of the implications for subjects and subjectivity. I have drawn on a range of resources developed in discourse analysis in psychology to work up an analysis which is attentive to the sequential interactions of the interviews, but crucially, is attempting to locate this analysis within larger semiotic social orders.

I have argued that success and failure are not simple binary opposites where one, success, is untroubled, and the other, failure, is troubled. Such an *a priori* assumption fails to grasp the moment to moment shifting and debated

identity work which is incorporated in talk of success and failure.

The chapter has introduced some of the objects central to participants' working up of constructions of success and failure. These include family, enduring relationships, and managing a balance between paid work and family. Lucey (2009, in press), citing Budgeon and Roseneil (2004), says the dominance of theories of individualisation processes have led to some commentators 'questioning whether or not the very notion of families is even relevant anymore when thinking about the ways in which people construct self-identity'. For the women in this study discourses of the family are pivotal to the way they work up passing identities. This is mediated though by dilemmas of adequacy and sufficiency. These dilemmas are temporarily resolved through recourse to multiple intersecting identities, intersections worked up in interactional practice.

What this chapter has shown is that asking speakers about success and failure is not a route to accessing cognitions or beliefs. Deploying concepts of success and failure is not a lexicographic task, but a social task. It is one which is managed with attention to normative rules of practice. It is a demand for a particularly precarious kind of identity work.

It is fair to say the extracts show few, if any, surprises in *what* women mark out as their successes and failures. But, this study does not set out to argue that we should be surprised by what women say counts as successful or failing. What it does set out to do is to argue for a particular way of understanding the complexity of the social *actions* inherent in the way these markers are constructed and deployed; what this says about how the discursive-psycho-social territory is constructed for and by women, the ideological dilemmas they encounter in

conversational interaction, the subject positions made available, or denied, the discursive resources available for managing those dilemmas and positions. These are resources to utilise, but they reflect back on speakers and so require careful navigation.

The next chapter continues all of these themes and styles of working, but turns attention now to the making of particular kinds of psychologised subjects: ones taking up discursive performances of modesty, agency, and emotional capitals.

Chapter 6. Psychologised and individualised selves

This chapter continues the exploration of sites of success and failure begun in chapter 5 by examining two more: a material domain, and a psychological domain. However, it connects these two domains through one of the central components of this thesis: an empirical illustration of the take up of psychologising and individualising discourses.

This notion of ‘psychologising discourses’ refers to the way certain patterns in talk make available the concept of a subject with a particular kind of interiority of experience, possessing ‘feeling’ states and exercising particular kinds of psychological capital; the psycho-discursive subject (Wetherell, 2003; 2007; Wetherell and Edley, 1999) of the psy-complex (Miller and Rose, 2008; Rose, 1996; 1999) presented in chapter 3.

‘Individualising discourses’ refers to the take up of patterns which assert and reassert the subject as a private, personal self, and an agentic subject, ‘I’. Skeggs (2004) argued that enacting this autonomous, agentic, ‘choosing self’ is now a moral imperative, a cultural ‘order’ for those wanting to understand themselves and be understood as ‘successful subjects’ (see also Bauman, 2001; 2005; 2007; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Moreover, the individualised, psychologised, responsible self, is one who not only *must* choose, but must also ‘bear in full the consequences of their choices’ (Bauman, 2007:4).

These concepts of psychologisation and individualisation are typically worked up in psychological and sociological literatures from different historical and intellectual trajectories (see chapter 3). In this chapter I combine the two, not

to disguise these different intellectual origins, but to draw attention to the way these two concepts are interwoven in mundane talk. When we look at how people talk, the business of ‘doing’ individualised selves – and individualised others – and of ‘doing’ psychologisation are utterly interwoven: understanding the self as an individualised subject is, in this particular historical location, to talk of the self as having a boundaried, individuated being, a particular kind of acting, choosing self with an internal individuated and individuating psychological life.

As I argued earlier, what is often missing from the grand debates of the contemporary subject is an empirical analysis of how these social theories of the successful psychologised, individualised, subject are taken up in constitutive discursive practices. This chapter provides a substantive empirical analysis of these psychologising, individualising discourses as they appear in talk of success and failure. It illustrates a deft nuancing in the way speakers mobilise resources and strategies as they work up contextualised ideological complexities and conflicts in this ‘neoliberal subject’.

Section 6.1. begins, perhaps somewhat surprisingly then, with the notion of material possessions as markers of success and failure. In one sense material wealth could be understood as something quite different to any notion of ‘psychologised’ states of success or failure. However, I will be looking at some of the intricate social action that takes place when speakers negotiate the conflicting demands of working up identities in relation to material possessions. Wealth is managed with displays of modesty, and a privileging of feelings of sufficiency and security. In addition, a concern for material goods is marked out as a particular kind of psychological deficit.

In sections 6.2. I briefly introduce two objects of psychological capital which appear particularly efficacious in constructing identities of success and resisting identities of failure. They are a discourse of happiness and a discourse of choice and doing what one wants. I show these resources in action throughout sections 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5. However, participants also orientate to choice as a source of tension and trouble and I explore this in section 6.6. Participants question the ‘authenticity’ of contemporary choice; and I explore the constitution of the ‘bad (failing) subject’ and the ‘good (successful) subject’ through ideas of good and bad choice, and responsible and irresponsible citizenship.

6.1. Material possessions: dilemmas of success, modesty, and deficit

At face value material wealth in a Western context might readily be understood as a form of success; and a counter story of poverty and economic hardship as a story of some sort of ‘failing’, either in a personal or collective sense. However, there appears to be a dilemma to be negotiated in working up identities of success around material possessions. On the one hand the imperative of contemporary sociopolitics is the conduct of a successful project of the self, one who provides materially for the self (Clarke, 2005). On the other, this appears to intersect with a normative demand for modesty in claims to success. Locke (2004) argued this in relation to athletes’ discussions of their sporting victories. A similar orientation appears to be activated in talk of wealth and possessions, alongside a different kind of stricture against talk of desiring such goods. Material success, or rather what gets *worked up* as material success, can threaten trouble if it is not well

negotiated.

Maria was one of the few participants to openly express delight in her affluence; but even this was very carefully handled. As this extract opens, Maria has been telling me that amongst other things financial success has allowed her to help her children. She then adds:

Extract 11.

[16:12/62:34]

- | | | |
|----|-------|--|
| 1 | Maria | erm (.) and it's nice having a nice car to drive round [in |
| 2 | Jean | [yeah |
| 3 | Maria | and having a nice house and (.) if they're symbols of success |
| 4 | | well then I love 'em |
| 5 | Jean | yeah |
| 6 | Maria | I enjoy them ((<i>laughter</i>)) |
| 7 | Jean | yeah |
| 8 | Maria | I think though (.) the thing is it's nice to have the (.) it's not a |
| 9 | | showy offy kind of success it's knowing that (.) if I want things |
| 10 | | I can get them |
| 11 | Jean | mmm |
| 12 | Maria | and if if (.) if I- if we want to go on holiday we can and to me |
| 13 | | that's successful because |
| 14 | Jean | mmm |
| 15 | Maria | we don't have to scrabble about [for stuff |
| 16 | Jean | [yeah |

17 Maria rather than swanking around

Maria constructs a body of contemporary material capital in this exchange. This begins with a nice car, a nice house, and later holidays. Taking up this identity of material success is a position which appears to be managed with care. This is first signposted by Maria's comment 'if they're symbols of success' (line 3). This suggests caution about presenting these possessions as resolutely successful, and suggests some orientation to the possibility that others might challenge the notion of material goods in general, and these goods in particular, as measures of success. However, there is no hesitancy about presenting them as a source of delight. Strong feelings are attached here to having a nice car and nice house: 'I love 'em... I enjoy them' (lines 4-6). There is an exuberance in this. This exuberance is quickly toned down though as Maria also enacts another kind of currency – a social currency of restraint. The delight in material wealth gets refashioned as a form of confidence in economic security, 'knowing that (.) if I want things I can get them' (lines 9-10), not having 'to scrabble about for stuff' (line 15). What is particularly interesting here is the way Maria's claims to success are managed. The house, cars, the holidays, are presented as not about 'swanking around' (line 17). Success is not to be flaunted, not 'showy offy' (line 9). So, even though Maria expresses a delight in these particular 'symbols of success', this material success is quickly re-positioned as a personal, private satisfaction, a security in not having to struggle to provide. This is a more muted success, sensitive to intersubjectivity, to how 'success' and claims to success might appear to others. It orientates to and reproduces a normative moral

sensibility to managing ‘success’ with discretion.

Material possessions appear to be difficult territory for claiming a successful identity. Despite the fact that several participants appear visibly affluent, living in more expensive districts, driving expensive cars, talking of several holidays a year, and satisfaction in being mortgage-free, etc., most are inclined to distance themselves from any concern for wealth. There appears to be a stricture at work against celebrating materiality and affluence. Participants speak of material wealth usually in modest terms rather than grand ambitions; as ‘sufficient for security’, rather than ‘excess’.

Extract 12.

[19:12/78:03]

- | | | |
|----|--------|--|
| 1 | Jean | is (.) has money been important (.) or things |
| 2 | Sheila | (unclear) god (.) money (.) to me (.) is security |
| 3 | Jean | right |
| 4 | Sheila | and if I was to win the lottery (.) after (.) making sure (.) that all |
| 5 | | my children (.) which I still think of as children even though |
| 6 | | they’ve grown up (.) after (unclear) for the rest of their lives and |
| 7 | | all my grandchildren (.) you know they like (.) pay for (.) make |
| 8 | | them secure (.) I’d still go and shop at Primark Jean |
| 9 | Jean | mm |
| 10 | Sheila | I would (.) y’know (.) I can’t honestly see (.) what I’d need |
| 11 | Jean | yeah |
| 12 | Sheila | quite (.) I’m sure it must be very nice not to ever (.) but I don’t |

13 have to worry about paying bills (.) between us we earn enough
14 (.) so money is not important (.) in one sense (.) but it is (.)
15 because everybody needs security don't they y'know

Money is important to Sheila as 'security' she says (line 2); to allow her to provide for her children and grandchildren, to 'make them secure' (lines 7-8) and indeed, this is constructed as an ordinary, normal, everyday concern: 'everybody needs security don't they' (line 15). So, money is valued, but restricted in its value, not endorsed or enjoyed for its own sake; but for 'security'.

The discourses Sheila recruits here are also directed to working up a more general position of restraint and contentment, an absence of greed or self-indulgence. More money would not change her, is her message here: 'I'd still go and shop at Primark' (line 8) ('Primark' is a high street clothing chain known for its low prices). But, the argumentative texture shines through again. Sheila also appears careful to avoid an extreme position, a piety perhaps, in her claims to not care for money. She starts to say 'I'm sure it must be very nice not to ever' (line 12), but then pauses. Given what follows, it seems reasonable to imagine Sheila was about to say 'not to ever worry about paying the bills'. This appears to work as a concession; there is something Sheila would appreciate about money. Then, Sheila stops herself and adds: 'but I don't have to worry about paying bills (.) between us we earn enough' (lines 12-13). This conjures up an identity here of 'material sufficiency'. This kind of material sufficiency was the most common form of doing material success across the interviews. It suggests an orientation to restraint; a problem with excess.

Here in this extract Sheila has worked hard with these dilemmas. She has produced a finely tuned position of modesty, restraint, and discreet financial success, so exquisitely orientated to the nuances of positioning around claims to wealth, and problems of excess, whether that be excessive self-indulgence, excessive desires, or excessive self-denial of the comforts of having sufficient money to not have to worry about paying the bills. This is a position of moderation.

That talk of money might be treated in this circumspect way points to how troubled that talk can be in the way it reflects back on speakers. But, this is a trouble of ‘talk’; of the reflexive indexical consequences of speaking about wealth. It appears to be quite different to ‘actual’ ownership.

Extract 13.

[20:49/124:46]

- | | | |
|----|-------|---|
| 1 | Paula | Tom has got a really good job (.) but (.) we're not really (.) |
| 2 | | materialistic people (.) |
| 3 | Jean | mm |
| 4 | Paula | y'know (.) so (.) when we go to his (.) company dos and what |
| 5 | | not (.) I don't almost fit really ((<i>laughs</i>)) into it (.) because |
| 6 | | they're all (.) business people who live in (.) houses like |
| 7 | | mansions and (.) y'know they've got all the designer [things and |
| 8 | | (.) |
| 9 | Jean | [yes |
| 10 | Paula | and that really isn't (.) isn't us because we don't (.) like (.) one |

- 11 person I know he needs all those things (.) to make him feel
12 good about himself

This opening comment ‘Tom has got a really good job’ (line 1) sets up a position of wealth for Paula to inhabit, at the same time as she is about to mobilise a discourse claiming a disinterest in materialism. This is just like the discursive strategy identified in the previous chapter, where considering alternative positions of mothering versus career effectively allowed the speaker to inhabit both. Paula is simultaneously claiming wealth and claiming a disinterest in wealth, which she uses to construct a difference between her and her husband and his business colleagues.

What is notable for me though about this particular extract is that the claim Paula makes about not being materialistic (lines 1-2) appears to be so at odds with the surroundings of our interview. This interview took place at Paula’s home, memorable to me for its conspicuous affluence. Paula had told me elsewhere in the interview about having grown up in a small two-up, two-down terraced house; and going to school with children of more wealthy families who lived on this same street where she now lived. This street is in an expensive district of the city. Paula’s home appeared to have been recently renovated to a high standard throughout, with an expensive design style, ultra chic fittings and modern technologies in all the rooms I passed through. There were also two new sports cars on the drive. This is not intended to dispute a ‘truth’ in what Paula says about not being materialistic. This study is not in the business of attempting to pin down ‘truths’ – an impossible goal for the epistemological and ontological

position underpinning the work. Rather, I am trying to draw attention to some pressure to make certain discursive reproductions. The pressure then, appears not to be directed at not *having* luxurious material goods but in constructing oneself as unaffected by material desires; constructing oneself as not ‘needing’ opulence. The final part of this extract is indicative of particular trouble.

It is common across the corpus to position others who *do* show an interest in material possessions as lacking in some ‘psychological’ attribute. Paula does this in extract 13 when she draws a contrast between her own case and someone she knows who, she says, ‘needs all those things (.) to make him feel good about himself’ (lines 11-12). There are many similar versions of this across the interviews. The interest in, or pursuit of material possessions is marked out as a psychological deficit.

Generally across the interviews this is applied to others; participants rarely claim an inadequate psychology for themselves. However, there is one exception.

Sally, quoted below, was one of the few participants who expressed any desire for more material wealth; and she too makes sense of this desire by organising it around a similar discourse of psychologised lack.

Extract 14.

[11:23/124:45]

- | | | |
|---|-------|---|
| 1 | Sally | I mean (.) I really pride myself in (.) y’know nice things [and (.) |
| 2 | Jean | [mm |
| 3 | Sally | strive (.) for more (.) |
| 4 | Jean | mm |

- 5 Sally and this is where the money comes into it you see (.) if I was
6 [earning more (.)
7 Jean [right
8 Sally I could spend more (.) I could buy more expensive things (.) or
9 whatever (.) they're all material (.) things I think (.)
10 Jean mm
11 Sally but they're things that I I felt that (.) I lacked (.)
12 Jean er like what
13 Sally so (.) that was the thing (.) y'know because I didn't like myself
14 that I don't think anybody else (.)
15 Jean right
16 Sally necessarily (.) would like me

Sally implies, uniquely in these interviews, she would like to buy more expensive things: 'if I was earning more ... I could spend more (.) I could buy more expensive things' (lines 5-8). She appears to link this to not liking herself (line 13) and an expectation that nobody else would like her either. The connection Sally is drawing here is not entirely clear. Immediately before this extract opens she had been talking about being unhappy with her weight. This path through priding herself in nice things (line 1) and things she lacked (line 11) and not liking herself or being liked seems to imply that Sally is making sense of her experience by interpreting a desire for material possessions through a discourse of emotional difficulty. Both Sally here, Paula above, and other participants throughout the interviews, organise an understanding of pleasure in, or need for, material

possessions around a story of psychological deficit. Possessions are positioned as a substitution, a compensation for some form of ‘emotional’ lack.

To claim material wealth then, or an overt interest in material things, appears to risk being understood as showing off, or of advertising some other psychological trouble. This is a great source of tension for subjects simultaneously alert to normative performances of modesty; to the need to navigate a route through suspicions that material goods are substitutes for psychological lack; and to manage this alongside contemporary cultural expectations of psychological, economic, embodied and material self-improvement projects.

6.2. Constructing psychological states of success

So far I have shown how participants mark out a series of sites where they locate and construct objects, subjects, and identities of success and failure: family and career in chapter 5; and material possessions here. I have also started to show that this site of the material incorporates discourses of psychologised territories of ‘security’ and ‘compensation’. Now I want to concentrate attention on this idea of a ‘psychology’ of success: the way speakers construct psychological states of success and failure and in so doing reproduce and reinforce an individualised psychologised subject. I will be focusing on two repertoires running across the interviews. The first is a discourse of ‘being happy’, powerful for the privileged, personalised knowledge it can constitute. The second is a particularly versatile discourse of choice: having choice, making choice, and doing what one wants. I understand both of these as discourses which contribute to the construction of

subjects who understand themselves to be ‘psychological’ subjects. To speak of emotion or feelings such as ‘happiness’, is to reproduce the self as a subject with personal psychological states (Wetherell, 2003; 2007; Wetherell and Edley, 1999). I similarly read choice as a ‘psychologised’ notion because I see ‘choice’ as a discourse which also asserts an individual, thinking, feeling, aware, agentic subject, ‘I’. To speak of a choosing subject reasserts an individualised, experiencing, ‘I’. This explicit reading of discourses of psychologisation addresses one of the key questions I raised in chapter 3: if psychologisation is a social process, what does it look like when subjects take up particular discourses and produce themselves as ‘psychologised’ selves?

6.3. Being happy

‘Being happy’ as a measure of success is a concept repeated frequently across the interviews and with remarkable similarity. Typically it is constructed as a necessary condition for ‘success’. This is illustrated in this extract from Sue who was interviewed with her friend Ruth:

Extract 15.

[09:23/104:40]

- | | | |
|---|------|---|
| 1 | Sue | I think (.) really (.) success is (.) doing and being what makes |
| 2 | | you happy |
| 3 | Jean | mm |
| 4 | Sue | because I think if you’re not (.) then (.) there’s no success there |
| 5 | | is there (.) |

- 6 Ruth no
- 7 Sue it's like you could- you could win the lottery (.) and say ah
- 8 look y'know brilliant (.) I've won the lottery y'know it's really
- 9 successful (.) materialistically (.) but (.) except at the end of the
- 10 day (.) you can be the most unhappy person in the world and (.)
- 11 to be unhappy you can't be successful the two (.) two are
- 12 opposites

This extract begins with a clear statement of success: 'doing and being what makes you happy' (lines 1-2). And, to make the point more persuasive Sue is able to mobilise an illustration: 'you could win the lottery (.) and sayit's really successful (.) materialistically (.) but (.) except at the end of the day (.) you can be the most unhappy person in the world' (lines 7-10). 'Happiness' then, outweighs even extreme material 'success'. In the definition worked up here, if one is unhappy, one cannot be successful.

This extract again reproduces the ambivalences around wealth noted earlier. This sequence of talk is another elegant illustration of the argumentative texture of talk conceptualised by Billig (1991; 1996). On the one hand, money *is* marked out as a potential measure of success, and notably with no attached requirement for 'earning' it. To simply possess wealth is its own form of success. On the other hand this material kind of success is played down and qualified; it is presented as having little value if it is absent of 'happiness'.

There is, though, no appearance of any pressure amongst any of the twenty four participants in this study to justify the prioritising of personal 'happiness'.

Billig (1999a) has argued that attention to what is *not* said can be as analytically revealing as what is said. I think this can be a difficult practice to implement in that the range of things ‘not said’ is infinite. Wetherell’s route through this is to contrast the discourses in play with those that might be mobilised by different discursive communities (personal communication). However, this concept of happiness and the way it is deployed here provides an alternative and valuable example of what Billig’s recommendation can offer. Thinking about what is not required to be said in connection with ‘being happy’ provides some important insights into current dominant cultural orders. There is no circumspection or precarious movement around claiming ‘happiness’. There is a taken for granted quality about the reasonableness of mobilising a discourse of happiness.

Above, Sue was talking *about* happiness. Now, I want to show what it looks like to ‘inhabit’ this discourse of being happy. Again, this absence of a defence of happiness is notable: here though ‘happiness’ works in tandem with a second discourse, a discourse of choice. I will be analysing the two together.

Extract 16.

[1:06/64:32]

- | | | |
|---|------|--|
| 1 | Jean | what does success mean (.) to you what do- what sorts of things |
| 2 | | does it conjure up |
| 3 | Dot | for me? |
| 4 | Jean | mm |
| 5 | Dot | for me being successful is being happy (.) and (.) and there are |
| 6 | | lots of things that- (.) that (.) go into that |

- 7 Jean yeh
- 8 Dot the most important thing in my life is my family
- 9 Jean yeah
- 10 Dot and if they're (.) happy content and well (.) then I am (.) hh
- 11 which begs the question of whether I think I've been a
- 12 successful parent doesn't it (.) and I suppose (.) for the most
- 13 part I think I've been a reasonably successful parent in that I've
- 14 got three (.) .hh well adjusted (.) kids
- 15 Jean mm
- 16 Dot who are (.) oh one's in his twenties (.) one's nearly twenty (.)
- 17 one's (.) approaching seventeen (.) and (.) they've not been in
- 18 any trouble they're (.) all doing (.) reasonably well in their lives
- 19 Jean yeh
- 20 Dot erm (.) then there's (.) my marriage (.)
- 21 Jean mm
- 22 Dot well I'm just coming up to twenty seven years so (.) I have to
- 23 class that as fairly successful
- 24 Jean yeah
- 25 Dot erm (.) my job? (.) my job is a new job (.) and I'm loving it and
- 26 I really really enjoy (.) but it's not a high powered job I'm just a
- 27 clerical worker in a hospital (.) I've actually (.) specifically
- 28 chosen that because (.) I've been self-employed for (.) fifteen (.)
- 29 sixteen years

30 Jean mm

31 Dot and I actually don't want the responsibility any[more

32 Jean [yeah

33 Dot I've walked away from that

34 Jean yeah

35 Dot I've got into a job where (.) I come home at (.) half past four (.)

36 and I don't have (.) the responsibility hanging over me

37 Jean mm

38 Dot because I don't want that any more (.)

39 Jean mm

40 Dot so this is ideal (.) and at the moment I can honestly say I'm (.)

41 my life (.) in my life (.) generally (.) I'm the happiest now that

42 I've been for a long long time

I said at the start of chapter 5 that many discursive resources collapse together in the interactional moment. Having teased out some of those resources there is now much familiar territory in this extract. What is particularly interesting now, seeing them recombined, is examining how these discourses are taken up together as an identity, as a subjectivity, as a personalised individualised psychologisation.

Dot begins by identifying success as happiness (line 5). What constitutes that happiness for Dot is first her family and whether they are happy and content (lines 8 and 10), and what that says for her as a successful parent in that her children are ‘well-adjusted’, ‘not been in any trouble’, and ‘all doing (.) reasonably well in their lives’ (lines 11-18); then Dot’s marriage (line 20),

successful for having lasted twenty seven years; her job (line 25), successful for Dot in part because she is ‘loving it’, but also because she has ‘specifically chosen’ it (lines 27-28).

This account unfolds as if Dot is reproducing a kind of ‘checklist’ of subject positions where one might be evaluated on achievements; the list indeed that emerged in the last chapter as concerns shared amongst the women in this study. But, what holds this account together, is this discourse of happiness, and a discourse of choice.

Dot begins by setting out the criteria for judging her successes. It is a personal, private measure – being happy. Whether Dot ‘is’ happy would be difficult to challenge because Dot can mobilise a discursive resource of ‘insider knowledge’ here. This makes any personalised claim to happiness a powerful resource. But, it is not impossible to challenge it. One can readily imagine the question ‘are you *really* happy?’ amongst, of course, many other possibilities. Dot’s account is effective though because she does not rely on simply claiming happiness to do all the work for her. She is able to mobilise other discursive resources to work up a persuasive, elaborated, argument to back up that claim. Dot not only tells us that success is being happy; but she also says what goes in to that, her children’s happiness, her enduring marriage, her job of choice, *and* Dot is able to claim success in all of them, underpinned by this discourse of ‘happiness’.

When Dot elaborates on what goes into happiness (lines 5-6) it works to legitimise both her claim to happiness and via happiness, to success. But, while ‘being happy’ is elaborated, it is not justified, or defended. The deployment of ‘being happy’ as a self-evident marker of success appears to require no warranting

of itself. What this suggests is that personal happiness is treated, here at least, as a legitimate goal, a legitimate end in its own right. The pursuit and attainment of happiness is for the moment uncontested. However, different resources mobilised by Dot do receive different levels of warranting and this is analytically useful.

Dot positions herself, her interests, her investments centrally on her family. That this should be so passes without comment; like happiness, no justification is required. This is taken as an entirely reasonable ‘given’, something akin to Ruth’s use of the discourses of naturalised order of ‘family first’ explored in the last chapter. But, Dot does rhetorically raise a query about her own claims to success; ‘whether I think I’ve been a successful parent’ (lines 11-12). She deals with this in a fairly straightforward way: she mobilises talk of three ‘well adjusted (.) kids’ (line 14) who have ‘not been in any trouble they’re (.) all doing (.) reasonably well in their lives’ (lines 17-18). No further accounting is needed; this is, quite literally, enough said.

Dot’s ‘then there’s (.) my marriage’ (line 20) adds another dimension to her successful identity. This requires even less warranting: ‘twenty seven years’ is treated as entirely persuasive in its own right – so much so that there is room for irony when Dot says ‘I have to class that as fairly successful’ (lines 22-23), an irony which works to emphasise further that a long marriage is an unquestioned success. Indeed, the idea that a successful marriage is an enduring marriage is a familiar construction across the interviews. Mel produced almost identical talk in extract 3 (see page 173).

However, at this point in Dot’s account, things get a bit more complicated and this provides some important insights which are taken up in the next section.

6.4. Choice

The focus moves now to a discourse of choice. I am continuing to draw on extract 16 taken from my interview with Dot because her intricate weave of discursive resources is so interesting. The patterns in the way this discourse of choice are used however, are not restricted to Dot but appear across the interviews.

So far in this extract from my interview with Dot, constructions of success have passed muster with relatively little orientation to contest. Dot has marked out family and marriage as sites for evaluating success, and has claimed them for herself as measures of her own success. The clinching details have been delivered efficiently and with little preamble. Dot moves on to speak of a ‘new job’. However, accounting for the new job, and fashioning this new job as a success receives much more work. This additional work suggests some tensions around the claim Dot is making, and points to some strategies for managing that tension.

The job is presented with an enthusiasm which works up its credentials as a success: ‘my job is a new job (.) and I’m loving it and I really really enjoy’ (lines 25-26). The job is quickly worked up, in terms of a psychologised, feeling, self, as an outstanding success. Dot is ‘loving it’ and she ‘really really enjoy[s]’ it. But, this preamble also postpones delivery of more ambivalent details: ‘but it’s not a high powered job I’m just a clerical worker in a hospital’ (line 26-27). ‘Just’ positions clerical work as low(er) status, in a similar vein to the way ‘just a housewife’ is a diminished position for Paula in extract 1 (see lines 142-151 on page 160, discussed on page 166). The difference however, is that Dot mobilises a particular discursive resource to re-fashion this job ‘just a clerical worker’ as

something of much greater value, something she has chosen: ‘I’ve actually (.) specifically chosen that’ (lines 27-28). This presents the job as something desirable, something one would particularly want, and something Dot is in control of. Speaking of choice, speaking as a choosing subject, is a readily available recognisable cultural ‘slot’ in this data. Contemporary culture in Britain disciplines subjects to ‘understand’ themselves as having choice, even if and where that choice is heavily constrained or indeed illusory (Walkerdine, 2003; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989). Deploying the concept in the way Dot does asserts and reproduces the ideological status of choice as a desirable object. However, making a choice brings its own accounting demands (Bauman, 2007; Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 1995; Clarke, 2005; Skeggs, 1997). This low status ‘choice’ needs to be accounted for if it is to pass as a ‘good’ choice, a ‘reasonable’ choice, a ‘successful’ choice. Dot elaborates: this new job means a reduction in responsibility compared to the previous responsibilities of fifteen or sixteen years of self-employment (lines 28-36). This is quite a charming sleight of hand. At the same time that Dot describes her employment as a clerical worker, which she constructs as a low status job signified by her use of ‘just’, a job orientated to as not a success in its own right, she is also able to position herself as someone who could and indeed has held much higher status employment, having been independently successfully self-employed. Dot may be a clerical worker now, but recruiting talk of previous responsibilities and self-employment marks her out as in possession of additional competences.

Dot legitimises her choice with a discourse of ‘not wanting’ (lines 31 and 38) – in this case, not wanting ‘the responsibility anymore’ (line 31). Moreover,

Dot avoids being positioned as having ‘lost’ her self-employed status, or have it taken away from her. Dot presents herself as in control of this change in status: ‘I’ve walked away from that (line 33), ‘I don’t want that any more’ (line 38).

Dot has drawn on a discourse of choice to legitimise her new job as a success, and has drawn on a discourse of wanting freedom from responsibility to legitimise that choice as a reasonable choice. Finally, Dot returns to her starting point in this very efficient working up of a successful identity. She is able to warrant her choice as the ‘right’ choice by weaving in again a discourse of happiness: ‘so this is ideal (.) and at the moment I can honestly say I’m (.) my life (.) in my life (.) generally (.) I’m the happiest now that I’ve been for a long long time’ (lines 40-42).

These two strategies, recruiting discourses of happiness and choice, have been very effective for working up an identity of success. The ‘being happy’ discourse provides enormous flexibility and freedom for claiming success. It allows ‘success’ to be separated from career accolades, economic goods, even the tensions and dilemmas of being a particular kind of parent, by reconfiguring it as a personal psychological measure. It is a highly individualised kind of success, reproducing and reinforcing the supremacy of the ideological project of the self, and the practical social construction of a psychologised reflexive, feeling, experiencing, self. ‘Happiness’ is constructed as a more ‘authentic’ form of success, or at least, a more meaningful form. As Sue suggested earlier (extract 15), material success is held in little consequence without psychological success.

Moreover, claiming happiness acts as a counter to propositions, imagined or actual, that one could be more materially wealthy, occupy a more senior

position in one's career, be more attractive, be held in higher regard, and so on. In other words, one might have made oneself to a higher specification in the neoliberal project of self production, but, if one is *happy*, then the absence of these other forms of success is mitigated. These other forms of success, desirable as they might appear, can be held in check by countering them with a claim to happiness. If one does not possess these other things, but one can claim happiness, the loss of these other objects to one's credibility as a successful person is less damaging.

In addition, claiming 'happiness' is a difficult claim for someone else to challenge. 'Being happy' is a personal evaluation. And by personal I mean of course a socially constructed, socially shared discourse applied as a personal statement, as intimate 'insider' knowledge, and thereby privileged. Being able to claim happiness is an effective strategy then in legitimising alternative and unconventional claims to being a successful person. However, that this is so, also points to how thoroughly established it has become in contemporary culture that individual 'happiness' is received as a 'good thing'.

So too, claiming choice is both a powerful accounting resource and an identity practice. Dot is not simply reporting abstract notions of 'success'. Rather, there is an identity being worked up here for Dot to inhabit and what we see are not only some of the familiar cultural resources for doing this, mother, wife, worker, but also Dot 'owning' the credit; this success is worked up (at least in part) as her doing; the rewards of her 'good' choices.

6.5. Re-fashioning 'failure': 'living the life one wants'

Satisfying one's choices, one's wants, is an effective discourse for disrupting conventional expectations of a success and failure binary. In this next extract from an interview with Nora, we can see how similar claims to making a choice can be deployed to fend off and re-fashion proffered identities of failure. There are some close similarities between this extract and the last. Both speakers are engaged in similar activity; Dot appeared to be orientating and responding to an unspoken, but potential query about the successful status of her new low paid, low responsibility job. Nora below, is responding to a spoken suggestion (albeit tentative) that she had failed at her marriage.

In this extract Nora has just explained that she initiated the divorce from her first husband. As the interviewer, I begin to offer Nora the opportunity to frame this divorce as failure: after all, lengthy marriages have commonly been worked up as successes (extracts 3 and 16). This is an available 'inversion', to borrow from Billig (1999a) and Kulick (2005). However, my hesitation is clear (lines 7-8).

Extract 17.

[16:10/48:02]

- | | | |
|---|------|--|
| 1 | Jean | is that something that you (.) look back at and feel confident |
| 2 | | you did the right thing (.) |
| 3 | Nora | oh (I never had) no doubt (.) |
| 4 | Jean | yeah |
| 5 | Nora | absolutely <u>never</u> had a doubt about it (.) not (.) to this day (.) |

- 6 absolutely not (.)
- 7 Jean you don't see it as (.) erm I'm not suggesting that you should
- 8 but I am aware [that some people think it's a (.)
- 9 Nora [did I see it as failure (.)
- 10 Jean yeah
- 11 Nora no (.) because it didn't work (.)
- 12 Jean yeah
- 13 Nora it didn't work (.) y'know when you think you're nineteen and
- 14 twenty (.) it's (.) very difficult to make anything work at that
- 15 age and add a baby to it y'know you are in trouble (.)
- 16 Jean mm (.) mm
- 17 Nora so it's y'know it's just (.) you can't (.) I don't think you can
- 18 ever (.) you can apportion blame (.) which I can (.) ((*laughs*))
- 19 but (.) at the end of the day (.) it didn't work and it makes you a
- 20 stronger pers- but it's not what happens to your life (.) it's what
- 21 you do about it (.)
- 22 Jean mm
- 23 Nora if it makes you a stronger person that's fine (.) y'know and it to
- 24 me it made me a stronger person (.) and (I needed to decide)
- 25 what I wanted to do in life and it wasn't that

Earlier analysis has already demonstrated a shared cultural repertoire of an enduring marriage as a taken for granted success. Here, in a contrast case, Nora's talk of a marriage ending is not however simply talk of failure. Instead, any

associations with failure are resisted. But, the talk here indicates both Nora and I orientate to the possibility of divorce implicating her in failure, although we do it in different ways.

For me, the interviewer, this is treated as a delicate moment reminiscent of the kind Silverman (1997) addresses. My delivery in lines 7 and 8 is cautious. I begin with ‘you don’t see it as (.).’ I stop, hesitate, I backtrack and say ‘erm I’m not suggesting that you should’ – but of course that is precisely the query I am raising – should one see a divorce as failure? So, I put some distance between myself and the question; I change my footing and I say ‘I am aware that some people think it’s a (.)...’ (line 8). Notably I still do not deliver this delicate word – ‘failure’. Nora though takes up the point more robustly on my behalf in line 9: ‘did I see it as failure’ she says for me, and immediately rejects it; ‘no (.). because it didn’t work’ (line 11). This is not delicate for Nora. While a position of failure has been opened up here, albeit offered tentatively, Nora has been able to reject it decisively. This makes an interesting contrast to the way Paula above reported her response to her teacher. There, Paula ventriloquised an invitation to take up a position of failure and that invitation *was* taken up. Paula says that her teacher ‘saw that I’d a lot of potential ... and I hadn’t (.). met that potential so she thought (.). it was a waste that I’d wasted my life ... and I thought (.). “have I have I wasted my life y’know (.). have I (.). perhaps I should’ve done something”’ (page 159, lines 127-132). Here Paula is ‘trying on’ this position she has been offered, temporarily inhabiting it, testing out the interpellation to see if it fits, ‘have I wasted my life’. Nora in contrast rejects adamantly my proffered position of ‘failure’; and maintains that resistance by continuing to work to persuade me. Her

strategies are worth attention.

The first is a simple outright rejection, 'did I see it as failure... no' (lines 9-11). Then, it gets more interesting. It was not 'failure', 'because it didn't work' (line 11). Nora works up a contrast between the possibilities of the marriage as failure, and a marriage that 'didn't work'. This is an interesting preference which speaks to pressures to resist positions of 'failure'.

Next appears to be the beginnings of a strategy to avoid apportioning blame, 'when you think you're nineteen and twenty (.) it's (.) very difficult to make anything work at that age and add a baby to it y'know you are in trouble' (lines 13-15). This hints at exoneration of the individuals; the difficulties were ones of circumstance, inexperience of youth, and weight of responsibility. And indeed Nora begins to suggest 'you can't... [apportion blame]', but then changes direction and says instead 'you can apportion blame (.) which I can' (line 18). This change in direction allows Nora to deflect any personalised responsibility for the marriage not working.

The next strategy is to recruit something of a homily on the virtue of working through 'failures' – or as Nora prefers to describe them, things that didn't work: 'it didn't work and it makes you a stronger pers- but it's not what happens to your life (.) it's what you do about it ... if it makes you a stronger person that's fine (.) y'know and it to me it made me a stronger person' (lines 19-24). Failure then can be re-inscribed as 'strengthening', as another form of success; a particularly moral success – one of 'character'. This is a particularly worrying strategy to me. To re-inscribe the painful possibilities of life as 'fine ... if it makes you stronger' is a powerful way of manoeuvring people into accepting, or

overlooking injustice, inequality, and exclusion. It maintains its power because it can be deployed both by the ‘oppressor’ and the ‘oppressed’ as a means of configuring events, to make them appear more acceptable, more tolerable.

The final strategy in this extract brings the analytic focus back to the notion of choice; to deploying talk of ‘what is wanted’: ‘(I needed to decide) what I wanted to do in life and it wasn’t that’ (lines 24-25). There is an implicit evaluation here that to have continued doing something one did not want to do would have been the failure. To terminate it was success. Deployed in this way, to cease doing what one does not want to do is another way of re-inscribing failure as success.

This is hugely consequential in the ideological positions it reproduces. One can imagine that the notion of ‘doing things one does not want to do’ could have been framed in very different ways; doing what is right, what is moral, what is dutiful, what is better for someone else, and so on. We can speculate that many other alternatives are available. But this is the discourse in use. As an available repertoire, as a means of legitimising actions, this discourse is extraordinarily powerful in encouraging an individualisation of the self, with a privileging of the self as a project to be prioritised. It also appears to be widely available and contextually flexible. Taylor and Littleton (2008) found a similar repertoire in their interviews with artists and designers who typically reported changing to art and design as a career because of the personal gratification it brought. This was a ‘good enough’ reason for entering and continuing a potentially precarious career.

However, Nora’s narrative is also dialogically vulnerable. Each point is readily challengeable in precisely the rhetorical, heteroglossic way Billig has

argued. The success of the narrative is provisional and not quite fixable. This is in part because the notion of ‘choice’ is a concept full of tensions for working up identities of success and failure. Choice is not a benign concept, and I address this now.

6.6. Whose choice? What choice?

‘Choice’, having choice, making choice, is frequently aligned across the corpus with responsibility for making the *right* choice. Simply deploying a discourse of ‘wanting’ works on some occasions; but not others. As a consequence it is a particularly mobile tool in working up and reproducing a range of troubled positions and moral orders. The women in this study though are far from naïve in this; instead they appear alert to living out a politics of choice.

‘Choice’ is deployed throughout the interviews as an intergenerational mark – an identificatory construct for marking social change between women now and constructions of women in previous eras. Speakers all draw on this as a cultural imaginary – a representation of past subjects deployed to achieve a rhetorical task now.

These two images in Figures 7 and 8 were presented together on one plate and so it is not surprising that direct contrasts would be made. However, a discourse of intergenerational differences in choice appeared in a range of places across the interviews, not solely in response to these photographs. It has wider relevance.

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Figure 7. A woman pours tea for her family, 1969. (Original Title: A Cup Of Tea. 1969.) Photo: Evening Standard/Getty Images. **Plate 3a** in Appendix E(1).

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Figure 8. A woman looks at a website on a kitchen laptop. (Original Title: Woman Looking at Website on Laptop in Kitchen. 2002.) Photo: Photodisc Collection/ Getty Images) **Plate 3b** in Appendix E(1).

Extract 18.

[21:45/73:34]

- | | | |
|----|------|--|
| 1 | Tess | I guess the difference in (.) I mean there are obviously (.) so |
| 2 | | many differences but the difference in the amount of <u>choice</u> |
| 3 | | that's available (.) |
| 4 | Jean | mm |
| 5 | Tess | the simple choices that have to be made (.) erm (.) for for our |
| 6 | | woman on the right ((<i>Figure 8: A woman looks at a website on</i> |
| 7 | | <i>a kitchen laptop</i>)) (.) I think that's interesting |
| 8 | Jean | in what way |
| 9 | Tess | in that she probably had a choice about well she she probably |
| 10 | | has a choice about where she's going to work how she's going to |

- 11 work how she's going to manage her time whether or not she
12 chooses to be a mother (.) erm (.) how she chooses to run her
13 relationships (.) who she chooses to have them with she
14 probably has much more choice over all those issues than our
15 nineteen (.) I'm amazed that's nineteen sixty nine (.) 'cos it
16 looks about (.) well (.) y'know it looks like twenty years earlier
17 or whatever (.) erm
- 18 Jean yes it does
- 19 Tess is life is life (.) necessarily easier for having a lot more choice
20 (.) I'm not sure that people necessarily think it is easier (.)
- 21 Rachel ((unclear overlapping speech))
- 22 Tess ((unclear overlapping speech)) you know (.) making choices is
23 not always comfortable
- 24 Rachel mm
- 25 Tess and (.) you know perhaps we've changed one set of chains for
26 (.)
- 27 Jean yeah
- 28 Tess a less visible set of chains in the kind of choices that we have (.)
29 I mean (.)

Tess constructs the kinds of choices women must make today (and by default, the kinds of choices they may be judged against – I come back to this shortly). It is also clear that choice is presented as problematic. Tess asks, 'is life is life (.) necessarily easier for having a lot more choice (.) I'm not sure that people

necessarily think it is easier (.) ... you know (.) making choices is not always comfortable' (lines 19-23). 'Choice', then, is potentially trouble. In addition, choice is constructed as quite the opposite to freedom: 'perhaps we've changed one set of chains for (.) ... a less visible set of chains' (lines 25-28).

In chapter 3 I presented an outline of the prevailing sociological argument that contemporary neoliberal practices compel subjects to take up certain choices in certain spheres of life (Clarke, 2005; 2006; Rose, 1996; 1999; Skeggs, 2004; 2005; Walkerdine, 2003). This is framed not as an actual 'choice' about being or becoming a choosing subject, but a compulsion to practices which make choice – decision-making – irresistible.

In the light of all this I referred to the notion of choice as an ironic deceit given this compulsion. But this is a deceit, or at least a tension, which participants appear to be rhetorically alert to. In my data, running alongside a discourse of choice is a discourse of a compulsion to do everything – to *not* have choice.

This compulsion is laid out in this next extract from a paired interview with two participants Cheryl and Barbara. Women are constructed here not as having more choices, but as having a bigger variety of demanding expectations laid upon them. 'Choice' as a facet of contemporary life for women is overwritten here by notions of expectations and demands. This extract reproduces a checklist of those expectations:

Extract 19.

[01:39/64:32]

1 Cheryl women are always bombarded with (.) ideals of womanhood (.)

- 2 and now (.) we've got to the stage we've gone through
3 feminism (.) and got to the stage where (.) a woman has got to
4 be (.) in a care::er (.) a woman has got to have (.) a really good
5 ho::me (.) a woman has got to have (.) the requisite amount of
6 children and they've got to be in a nursery and you've got to be
7 going out with your husband to (.) back his (.) erm career up
8 Jean yeah
9 Cheryl and (.) so now (.) you (.) you've got to do everything so from (.)
10 not having a career probably (.) now we've moved right through
11 the century to having to have (.) everything (.) and be good at
12 everything
 [... 12 seconds omitted]
14 Cheryl yeah (.) you've got to look good you've got to be a good mother
15 you've got to have a good career you've got to be able to do (.)
16 everything

This is both a summary of the cultural slots in which women understand themselves to be judged and a rejection of the idea that this might be understood as 'choice'. On the one hand there is an available discourse of choice which has been demonstrated to be a versatile tool for doing a range of identity work and for navigating a way through potential trouble. Reynolds (2004) argued a similar point in her study of discourses of singleness. And, not surprisingly, we can see it extends beyond relationship accounting to a wider sphere – much as the neoliberal narrative would imagine. On the other hand we can see that people are not

passive dupes in this neoliberal story; they are able to question notions of choice, reinterpret this neoliberal discourse and re-work it, to resist the ‘authenticity’ of ascriptions to choice. This is a much more nuanced understanding of the way subjects take up neoliberal discourses of choice than, for example, Walkerdine’s reading. For Walkerdine, who is an important interlocutor here because of her commitment to exploring the discursive psychologisation of the subject (Walkerdine, 2003), the neoliberal subject is one who outwardly composes herself as the perfect Foucauldian subject through whom neoliberal discourse is spoken. In Walkerdine’s reading, the conflicts inherent in making a coherent and successful neoliberal subject are dealt with by this subject unconsciously, internally, and through a psychoanalytic depth (Walkerdine, 2003; Walkerdine and Bansel, 2009). In contrast, what I am illustrating here is that the complexities, intricacies and conflicts of neoliberalism are worked up by speakers through a keen grasp of ideological dilemmas and contextualised argument.

I noted in chapter 3 that while ‘choice’ is a central construct of much contemporary discourse, who has the right to *make* choices, and *what* choices, is a contentious, moralised issue. Skeggs (1997; 2005; Skeggs, Thumin and Wood, 2008) has argued that representations of social class are marked by moralised hierarchies of taste, understood as ‘good choice’ and ‘bad choice’. Clarke (2005) has argued that responsibilised citizenship is also marked out by ‘good choice’ and ‘bad choice’. He says:

New Labour’s ideal citizens are moralized, choice-making, self-directing subjects. ... choice is framed by sets of injunctions about reasonable

choices and responsible behaviour. Responsible citizens make reasonable choices – and therefore ‘bad choices’ result from the wilfulness of irresponsible people, rather than the structural distribution of resources, capacities and opportunities. (Clarke, 2005: 451)

The argument is that speakers have been responsibilised into understanding certain organisations of choice as good and bad. Here, I want to show what this organisation of ‘good choice’ ‘bad choice’ can look like. This is a particularly telling extract because it comes from the same interview with Dot I drew on above in extract 16 to illustrate how effective a discourse of choice can be in warranting claims. Again, these patterns are not unique to Dot, but the contrast with her previous use of choice is analytically very useful. There, Dot was able to use ‘choice’ to legitimise a claim to a successful work identity, and indeed to a successful self, and that included resisting something she no longer wanted: responsibility. Choosing to walk away from responsibility was presented unquestionably as a choice she was free and able to make, and did make. Here though, Dot works up a connection between choice and responsibility in a very different way:

Extract 20.

[24:21/64:32]

- 1
2 Dot oh hate that (.) hate it ((Figure
3 9.))
4 Jean really
5 Dot absolutely loathe it
6 Jean tell me what it is
7 Dot I'm full of admiration in some
8 ways for this lady
9 Jean yeh
10 Dot I've seen her on television (.)
11 and (.) she (.) I'm (.) I (.) I'm
12 full of admiration because of
13 her determination (.)
14 Jean mm
15 Dot to (.) to be what she wants to be
16 Jean mm
17 Dot however (.) I do have this (.) strong (.) problem (.) really big
18 problem at the moment (.) of (.) people taking responsibility for
19 their actions (.) I mean in some ways I feel this lady doesn't (.)
20 Jean oh right
21 Dot because she chose to have a baby when she couldn't look after
22 it

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Figure 9. Marble sculpture of Alison Lapper, by Marc Quinn, 2005. (Original Title: Controversial Statue Unveiled In Trafalgar Square, 2005.) Photo by Scott Barbour/ Getty Images. **Plate 23** in Appendix E(1).

- 23 Jean mm
- 24 Dot and (.) expected (.) that (.) the state (.) should help her have her
- 25 baby and look after it
- 26 Jean mm
- 27 Dot and I've got this thing (.) where (.) ((*long breath out*)) there are
- 28 too many people in (.) our society (.) who (.) just expect other
- 29 people to take (.) to look after them
- 30 Jean yeah
- 31 Dot it's like y'know these people who have (.) three or four (.)
- 32 children (.) with no (.) there's nobody (.) no (.) no (.) main
- 33 wage-earner in the family (.) and they live off the state and I
- 34 object to it
- 35 Jean mm
- 36 Dot I do (.) bitterly object to it (.) and the one (.) one of the things
- 37 that I (.) I frequently (.) have said to my children is (.) that you
- 38 have to (.) be able to look after yourself (.) you have to be (.)
- 39 prepared to take responsibility for your actions
- 40 Jean mm
- 41 Dot and whi- (.) on the one hand I can understand she wanted a
- 42 child and she did everything that she could (.) to be (.) mum
- 43 Jean yeh
- 44 Dot but the fact is she couldn't look after that child
- 45 Jean mm (.) I-
- Dot and I sort of object in a way (.) to the rest of us having to pay

The opening to this extract surprised me in the apparent strength of feeling conveyed in response to the image of the statue of Alison Lapper: ‘oh hate that (.) hate it... absolutely loath it’ (lines 1-4).¹¹ I asked for clarification – ‘tell me what it is’ (line 5). Dot’s reply, ‘I’m full of admiration in some ways for this lady’ (lines 6-7) begins by tempering her opening comments. But, this is a qualified admiration placed in some tension with what Dot later calls her ‘strong (.) problem... of (.) people taking responsibility for their actions’ (lines 16-18). Dot mobilises a set of discourses to work up an *imagined* Alison Lapper. This imagined Alison Lapper is deployed as an exemplar of the cultural imaginary, the ‘irresponsible subject’. She is marked out as such because, in the construction Dot works up, ‘she chose to have a baby when she couldn’t look after it... and (.) expected (.) that (.) the state (.) should help her have her baby and look after it’ (lines 20-24). The ‘state’ is later converted into ‘the rest of us having to pay’ (line 45). This subject can be positioned as irresponsible precisely because a discourse of choice is available, and her choice can be, and is, inflected as the wrong choice.

Dot is able to mobilise a contrast case by working up an account of herself as a responsible citizen. When Dot says ‘one of the things that I (.) I frequently (.) have said to my children is (.) that you have to (.) be able to look after yourself (.) you have to be (.) prepared to take responsibility for your actions’ (lines 35-38),

¹¹ Alison Lapper is a British artist who studied at the Heatherley School of Fine Art and then graduated with first class honours from the University of Brighton. Her exhibitions include painting, photography, digital imaging and installation. In 2003 she was a ‘Woman of the Year’ in Spain and was awarded an MBE in Britain for services to art. She teaches seminars and workshops at various colleges and is a teacher/ member of the Mouth and Foot Painters Association and has been the subject of many national and international television and radio programmes and newspaper and magazine articles. *Source:* www.alisonlapper.com

Dot is *doing* a particular formation of a successful subject – the ‘responsible’ citizen, one who makes the right kind of choices and moreover one who is raising her children to be similarly good citizens.

Finally, by invoking ‘the rest of us’ Dot is able to dilute a risky appearance of purely self-interested concern and instead align herself and ‘us’ with a responsible citizenry who are being taken advantage of.

The Bakhtinian notion of the evaluative accent is clearly evident here in the ‘bad subject’, worked up through concepts of irresponsibility, and making unreasonable demands of the state and ‘the rest of us’. What Dot is reproducing here is a dialogical, ideological, tension around who has a ‘right’ to choose and what might outweigh this ‘right’. Having choice is constructed as *morally* conditional on making the *right* choice. And the right choice is contingent.

There is considerable parity here with the arguments Skeggs and Clarke made for example. But there is something more nuanced in this account which is attentive to the ethnomethodological detail of what happens when subjects reproduce such ideological discourse as local interactional accounting. Looking back at extract 16 (page 209) illuminates this claim. There, Dot’s warrant for why her new job as ‘just a clerical worker’ (lines 26-27) was a success for her, was because as she explained, ‘I actually don’t want the responsibility anymore... I’ve walked away from that... I don’t have (.) the responsibility hanging over me... because I don’t want that any more’ (lines 31-38).

Dot justifies her right to free herself from responsibility by calling on a narrative of having previously *exercised* responsibility, having ‘been self-employed for (.) fifteen (.) sixteen years’ (lines 28-29). This combination sets up

an implication that Dot has ‘earned the right’ to shelve responsibility and prioritise her individualised ‘wants’. Any collective obligations – those she imposes on others, are constructed as having been fulfilled, at least for this interactional moment.

There is something important here about the ideological tension between discourses of choice and discourses of responsibility. Because both are so useful for challenging the other, they keep each other unresolved and fixed and in contest. Subjects positioned by one are always vulnerable to the evaluative, positioning, accents of the other.

6.7. Chapter summary

As participants construct themselves as (usually) successful and (rarely) failing subjects, they are at the same time constructing themselves as living out particular kinds of individualised, psychologised selves, rich in the right emotional capitals and moral, relational, agentic, competences. To manage claims of success and failure requires not only the right kinds of claims but the right kinds of management of claims: they must be handled with modesty and decorum.

The previous chapter considered some of those markers of success and failure which work across a relational domain, including family, lasting marriages, and the balance between paid work and family. This chapter has added two more domains: the material and the psychological.

Given the persuasive argument that there is a current cultural imperative to be a materially successful self (Clarke, 2005; Skeggs, 2004; 2005; Walkerdine, 2003), material wealth – an outward, often visible, indicator of contemporary

success – is treated with perhaps surprising caution. It is embraced by a restrained vocabulary of ‘security’, and more ostentatious or overt wealth is treated *in talk* with suspicion. Wealth and material possessions are configured in some kind of relation with psychological deficit.

At the same time, identities marked discursively by an absence of wealth can be fortified by claims to happiness. ‘Happiness’ is discursive capital which can be employed to outrank other forms of success. More than that though, contemporary success as it is constructed here, *requires* claims to happiness as a particular kind of psychological accomplishment for the successful subject.

In addition this chapter has explored some of the consequential action for taking up a discourse of choice. To assert a discourse of choice asserts an individualised, psychologised agent ‘I’. Yet, at the same time, participants construct an ‘I’ far from free to choose, but one bounded by expectations and constrained to make the right choices.

Throughout this study participants are engaged in precisely the rhetorical dilemmatic, argumentative, vulnerable, working up of their positions and their accounts and their claims just as Billig (1991; *et. al.*, 1988) proposes they would be.

In the process of recruiting different resources, making different interpretations, participants are interpellated into a range of shifting and provisional subject positions. These shifts show an enormous amount about the complexity of contemporary identity making, and the challenge of presenting oneself as a whole, unified subject who may pass muster. This notion of the subject who passes flows through my next chapter as I take up a discussion of

imagining successful and failing others.

Chapter 7. Imagining moral bodies: discourse and fantasy

A central research aim for the thesis is to examine some of the heteroglossia of women's lives: the many-voiced intertextualities out of which meaning-makings of success and failure are constructed. As part of this project I want to go beyond what women say about themselves, to explore also what women say about *other* women. My assumption in this is that what women say about other women tells us something about the resources available for making sense of selves too. So, this chapter is primarily concerned with how women speak about other women but later I also consider what this implies for the reflexive construction of selves and subjectivities.

The data for this chapter are drawn primarily from those sections of the interviews which discuss the photo images of other women compiled for this study as a means of providing concrete examples of 'others' to seed discussion and elicit discursive resources (see Appendix E(1)). I introduced the photographs by telling participants they might recognise some of the subjects as famous faces while others were unknown; I told participants there was a brief description on the reverse of each photograph; I then asked them to pull out and tell me about any of the photographs they found interesting in terms of how the photographs might relate to participants' ideas of success and failure and what a successful life looks like. Participants were free to work with the photographs in any order or combination and any number. Consequently sequences differed across the interviews. I will be arguing that the data supporting my analysis is not just an

artefact of this visual method, however. I will be demonstrating that this process of constructing imaginary others runs throughout the talk in these interviews and is embedded in the culturally shared resources available for making sense of selves and others and peopled worlds.

I will be interpreting the discursive construction of others through the notions of imagination, fantasy and projection. However, I am using these terms as practices of language, and not in their perhaps more familiar orientation as unconscious psychoanalytic defences. I will be arguing that the phenomenon of imagining others is a thoroughly social and discursive process. Projecting concerns, interests and investments onto others, is a discursive process which is accomplished through the mobilisation of intersecting interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positions in the rhetorical to and fro of sense-making.

I begin in 7.2 by illustrating the pervasive and evaluative orientation to 'appearance' which runs through talk in response to my questions about successful and failing others, particularly as that refers to participants' talk about women celebrities, and their focus on the body and appearance as a site of moral organisation and constructions of idealised femininity. I will be exploring moral order in talk of others, what 'getting it right', and 'getting it wrong', looks like. I will point in passing to how participant commentaries and evaluations of these others are elaborated and legitimated through the themes covered in chapter 5 and 6, particularly in the way psychological states are imagined, such as happiness, for example. Moreover, I will be suggesting that what organises these divisions into successful and failing others is a hierarchy of classifications into who is a valued,

worthy, respectable woman, and who is not.

In section 7.3 I turn to the issue of personal order in the way others are imagined. Having argued that the accomplishment of imagining others is built in to socially shared resources and cultural investments, here I will be illustrating that the way biographies and investments are imagined is also deeply rooted in personal history and sedimenting patterns of discursive investments.

The final section, 7.4, summarises the analytic lenses drawn on here from resources developed in discourse studies in social psychology. Imagining and fantasising others is interpreted not as some unconscious, hidden, ego-directing defence mechanisms directing behaviours as a psychoanalytic psychosocial might suggest, but rather as mobilisations of sedimented reflexive intersecting discursive practices.

7.1. Imagining moral beauty: getting it right, getting it wrong

There appeared to be a pervasive and evaluative orientation to appearance running across the interviews. I was not surprised that appearance was a topic for discussion when participants were asked to turn their ‘gaze’ to photo images of others. But, I was surprised at the similarities in constructions across the interviews, both in terms of which of the women in the photographs are constructed as ‘getting it right’ and which are constructed as ‘getting it wrong’. ‘Getting it right’ and ‘getting it wrong’ are my interpretative terms, but I think the argument here supports their use.

7.1.1. *Getting it right*

The two images in Figure 10, Nigella Lawson, and Figure 11, Joanna Lumley,

were routinely pulled out as women ‘getting it right’.

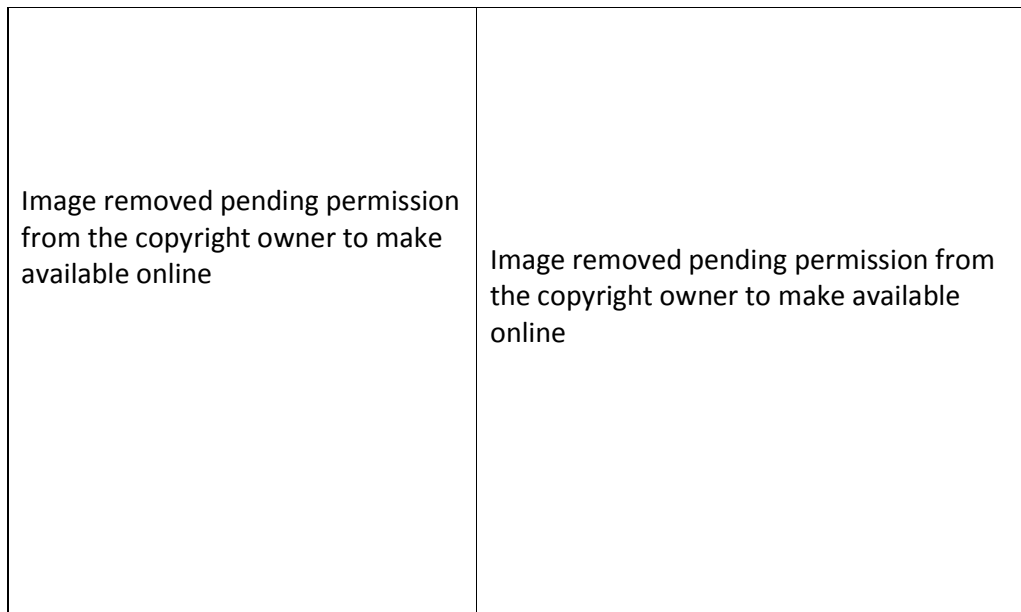


Figure 10. Nigella Lawson, cookery author and presenter, 2003. (Original Title: The Saatchi Gallery Opening Party 2003) Photo by John Li/Getty Images. **Plate 26** in Appendix E(1).

Figure 11. Joanna Lumley, actress, 2005. (Original Title: Sea Princess.) Photo by Chris Jackson/Getty Images. **Plate 1** in Appendix E(1).

Extract 21.

[73:05/113:11]

- | | | |
|---|------|--|
| 1 | Gail | Nigella Lawson I think is is is actually very beautiful I think |
| 2 | | she’s erm (.) probably the most beautiful er (.) woman on tv and |
| 3 | | I admire her quite a bit I think she’s erm (.) y’know just erm (.) |
| 4 | | looks right (unclear word) (.) y’know I always think everybody |
| 5 | | would like to look like Nigella Lawson |

Extract 22.

[57:26/67.37]

- 1 Mel oh well she's got it all hasn't she (.) ha (.) she is very attractive
2 (.) that's that (.) erm she's a cook isn't she
3 Jean that's right yes
4 Mel yeah (.) she's attractive and she can cook she must be
5 everybody's dream

The woman represented in Figure 10, Nigella Lawson, is a public figure known particularly for her television programmes on home-cooking. She is unequivocally presented throughout these interviews as 'beautiful': and for some speakers, 'probably the most beautiful er (.) woman on tv' (extract 21, line 2). Moreover, her appearance is something that passes moral assessment. She is someone to 'admire' (extract 21, line 3). In extract 22 she is presented as someone who has 'got it all' (line 1); she is 'everybody's dream' (line 5) of the perfect woman. Indeed, there are hints here that her looks and her food are everything a women needs to be successful – although this latter comment could suggest some irony.

It also draws attention to something intriguing and complex about the way both participants, Gail and Mel, invoke 'everybody' (extract 21 line 4, and extract 22 line 5). It seems clear enough that when Gail suggests 'everybody would like to look like Nigella Lawson' (lines 4-5) she does not mean all people – women *and* men. It seems more likely she is indexing 'women' and probably some

particular group of women. It is obviously not possible to say who, but the ambiguity of ‘everybody’ is apparent.

In extract 22 Mel invokes ‘everybody’ in quite a different way. Mel suggested Nigella Lawson was ‘attractive and she can cook she must be everybody’s dream’ (lines 4-5). This raises a question about whose version of the idealised woman Mel is reproducing. Appearance and cooking are not prioritised in the data underpinning the previous two chapters where women construct notions of success and failure. I am not suggesting that this means my participants have no regard for either of these objects, simply because they are discussed little (although this conundrum is an important topic for another place). What I am suggesting is that this version here of the woman that has ‘got it all’ is quite different to the versions constructed in the previous two chapters. One possibility is that Mel is imagining Nigella Lawson as every *man’s* dream.

In these two extracts then, Nigella Lawson is imagined as someone women want to look like, and imagined as what men want in the perfect woman. In addition, both speakers ‘imaginings’ are projected onto others who are also constructed in a particular way.

One of the features that unites these two extracts is the notion that women understand appearance to be something which carries capital, and according to which women will be evaluated as succeeding or failing. Also marked out as ‘getting it right’ is the British actress, Joanna Lumley (Figure 11). Participants call on a wider but remarkably consistent repertoire as they construct this figure.

Extract 23.

[49.03/67.37]

- 1 Mel I like her (.) she doesn't take herself too seriously (.) Joanna
2 Lumley (.) she's got a sense of humour (.)
3 Jean yeah
4 Mel and look she's got wrinkles (.)
5 Jean yeah
6 Mel and she's still beautiful (.)
7 Jean yeah
8 Mel I like her (.) I think she's smashing

Extract 24.

[09.59/89.07]

- 1 Cheryl I was going to say (.) to me she would be (.) a successful
2 woman because she's so (.) unaffected by her beauty and she's
3 so unaffected by her career (.) and she I know she's a
4 grandmother (.) and she's just so (.) serene
5 Jean yes
6 Cheryl and [I think
7 Barbara [and feminine as well
8 Cheryl yes she's serene feminine and she's unaffected by (.) media (.)
9 and celebrity (.) and (.) she has succeeded in what she does (.)

10 as an as an actress (.) and and as a woman really and she's (.)
11 Barbara yeah (.) yeah you're right (.) and she she's got a good sense of
12 humour she can laugh at herself

Again, when the women in this study talk about Joanna Lumley, she is regularly constructed as beautiful, but this is only part of her evaluation and it is routinely combined with other qualities. This time a multiplicity of sites of success familiar from chapters 5 and 6 are mobilised, and this particular woman is presented as successful in them all: beauty, career, family (she is a grandmother), and moreover, she is accredited with the right psychological dispositions to accompany this; she manages her success in these arenas well, she is 'unaffected' 'serene', and she has 'a good sense of humour she can laugh at herself' (line 11-12). She is 'feminine'; she has 'succeeded... as a woman' (lines 9-10).

Beauty is evaluative here; but it is not explicitly marked out by participants as success though, so I want to explain why I am treating it as such. Firstly, I ask about success and failure; what I get in reply are descriptions of appearance and so it seems clear that appearance is amongst participant orientations for addressing success for women.

In addition, Cheryl's construction of Joanna Lumley being 'unaffected' (line 3) by her beauty is reminiscent of the normative rule of 'modesty' and not 'showing off' discussed in chapter 6. That Joanna is praised for not being affected by her beauty suggests she is understood as possessing something of value in this 'beauty', something which other women might manage with less decorous disposition, thus making it all the more successful for this figure,

Joanna.

It is noticeable that throughout the interviews constructions of ‘beauty’ rarely appear to be directly aligned with any negative positioning. The notion of ‘beauty’ is frequently treated as self-explanatory and is rarely elaborated by participants. It often appears in a list of apparently admirable qualities as in extract 24 above, and, because of this and the way it generally appears to require little or no clarification there it appears to be orientated to as self-evidently ‘good’.

However, beauty is not entirely trouble free. This is a response to a collage of photographs of Elizabeth Taylor (see plate 10, Appendix E(1)).

Extract 25.

[34:10/67:37]

- | | | |
|---|------|---|
| 1 | Mel | she were really beautiful weren't she |
| 2 | Jean | yeah Liz Taylor yeah |
| 3 | Mel | just naturally (.) [beautiful |
| 4 | Jean | [yeah |
| 5 | Mel | sadly however (.) they never know when to let it go (.) do they |
| 6 | | (.) ((<i>laughter</i>)) why don't they just grow old gracefully |

This constructs a right way, and a wrong, to manage one's ‘aging’ beauty - gracefully. Joanna Lumley was constructed as getting this right too. Mel commented above, ‘look she's got wrinkles ... and she's still beautiful’ (extract 23, lines 4-6). There is a reminder however, that this must be managed well. In this next extract we see the way Joanna Lumley's management of her looks is

subject to considerable scrutiny.

Extract 26.

[46:25/78:03]

- 1 Sheila my (.) nephew (.) who used to work at the BBC (.) says she (.)
2 looks (.) so dreadful without her makeup on you wouldn't
3 recognise her (.) and I can never look at her now without
4 thinking about that (.) because she always seems to come across
5 as s::o (.) glamorous
6 Jean mm (.) yeah I would have said yeah
7 Sheila er if she (.) and if she's (on a show) you should see her first
 thing in the morning you wouldn't say that

Someone constructed so positively is also manoeuvrable into a diminished position – one on the point of failure. Even here, success can quickly be made precarious.

7.1.2. Getting it wrong

Plate 17 in the collection (Appendix E(1)), reproduced in Figures 12 and 13, showed two photographs of Victoria Beckham. Victoria Beckham earned international celebrity status and enormous financial rewards during the 1990s as a member of an all female popular music group the Spice Girls. She earned even more notoriety after her marriage to David Beckham the England footballer, and

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Figure 12. Duchess of York (left) and Victoria Beckham (right), 1999. (Original title: The Duchess of York and Victoria Beckham backstage at Earls Court.) Photo by Dave Hogan/Getty Images. **Plate 17a** in Appendix E(1).

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Figure 13. Naomi Campbell (left) and Victoria Beckham (right) 2003. (Original title: Naomi Campbell (left) and Victoria Beckham pose for pictures at the Costume Institute's Spring 2003 'Goddess' exhibition and Gala at the Metropolitan Museum New York, 2003.) Photo: Laura Cavanaugh ©UPI/Image Collection (EBSCO). **Plate 17b** in Appendix E(1).

for their lifestyle and business ventures. Victoria Beckham rarely appears to receive favourable press in the British media. Therefore I had anticipated she might be an interesting and contentious figure here, but I had not anticipated how consistently unforgiving the judgements would appear, to me, to be. She was described as 'vacuous', 'talentless', and 'the big I am'. Talk of her size was a common theme. She was described as 'skinny', a 'stick insect', and parodied as saying 'look at me I only eat six raisins a day aren't I great'. The disapproval seems palpable. There were occasional moments of perhaps a more sympathetic approach; but these were short lived. This extract from the interview with Mel is fairly typical.

Extract 27.

[51:09/67:37]

- 1 Mel Victoria Beckham I think she's just weird (.) but I think she's
2 probably extremely unhappy (.) that lass (.) because she's
3 married to David Beckham (.) and I think she's very insecure (.)
4 I think she's terrified of losing him
- 5 Jean mm
- 6 Mel but that's just me
- 7 Jean yeah (.)
- 8 Mel and I (.) I think she's strange looking (.) to be honest (.) I mean
9 what on earth is that get up
- 10 Jean yeah (.) it's kind of looks like a cross between a (.) negligee
11 [and (.) yeah and a camisole and (.) yeah
- 12 Mel [backwards (.) yeah look at me look at me (.) and she's got that
13 snooty look on her face
- 14 Jean her face has changed quite (.) a bit over the years hasn't it
15 because this one's quite a bit earlier ((*Figure 12*))
- 16 Mel yeah (.) yeah (.) she's almost normal there (.) but she was
17 always strange even when she was normal (.) spring ninety-nine
18 so yeah four years on (.) four years on and we've got a complete
19 change
- 20 Jean yeah
- 21 Mel see (.) I don't know how people can do that because (.) that

- 22 obviously was her ((*Figure 12*))
- 23 Jean yeah
- 24 Mel how has she got to that (.) ((*Figure 13*))
- 25 Jean yeah
- 26 Mel does she feel comfortable with that (.) or is that all an act and if
- 27 it's an act (.) how can you keep doing that

In Mel's description, typical of all the interviews, Victoria Beckham is presented as getting the *look* wrong, and getting the *psychology* wrong. She is said to be 'strange' (line 8), have a 'snooty look' (line 13), indeed, to have always been 'strange even when she was normal' (line 16). Moreover, she is imagined to be 'unhappy' (line 2), 'insecure' (line 3), 'terrified' (line 4), and any feelings of being 'comfortable' she might have are queried as 'all an act' (line 26). Victoria appears to fail all the implicit and explicit tests of successful womanhood, and she is thoroughly disapproved.

It is interesting to see that this disapproval is vindicated by speakers through recourse to one of the central warranting discourses of success from the previous chapter: happiness. Victoria is held to 'fail', because she is routinely imagined to be 'unhappy' (line 2) and 'insecure' (line 3).

'Imagining' this other as 'unhappy' and 'insecure' is a fascinating way of castigating someone without appearing to be wanton about it: one can disapprove of and denounce a person, and inoculate that criticism with talk of that person's 'unhappiness'. Constructing someone as caught up in such a failing psychology helps to inoculate a speaker against a charge of envy, for example. This is still a

speculative argument for me. It may be this particular ‘imaginary’ unhappiness does carry strategic reflexive function in this way, but I am uncertain. There are other alternatives.

There is something of a moral panic (Thompson, 1998) around discussions of Victoria Beckham. In this data this seems to centre on her appearance being imagined as a bad role model for girls. Dot’s comments in the next extract reflect several made during the interviews.

Extract 28.

[38:25/64:32]

- | | | |
|----|------|--|
| 1 | Dot | pretty much everything about her (.) er (.) I don’t like (.) I don’t |
| 2 | | like what she <u>stands</u> for (.) and (.) and I suspect she’s an |
| 3 | | incredibly insecure woman |
| 4 | Jean | mm |
| 5 | Dot | erm (.) but (.) I I don’t like what she represents I don’t like what |
| 6 | | she stands for and I don’t want <u>anybody</u> like Victoria Beckham |
| 7 | | (.) to be a role model for my daughter |
| 8 | Jean | yes |
| 9 | Dot | because (.) because to look like that for <u>most</u> people is |
| 10 | | unrealistic |
| 11 | Jean | yeh (.) yeah |
| 12 | Dot | and she (.) she (.) she may have a lot of money and (.) y’know |
| 13 | | and fame and all the rest of it but (.) I wonder if she’s happy |
| 14 | Jean | mm |

- 15 Dot [I do wonder if she's ha-
16 Jean [who would you pick as a role model (.) do you think (.) what
17 would be the sort of person that you would like
18 Dot er (.) you've got one in here (.) erm (.) what's her name (.)
19 Nigella [Lawson
20 Jean [Nigella (.) yeah
21 Dot she makes me laugh (.) now there's a confident lady who's (.)
22 she's not (.) she's not tiny (.) she's not slim (.) she's (.) she's a
23 nice chunky lady (.) lots of curves

Size, then, is made a moral issue here. Nigella Lawson, who was seen above constructed as 'getting it right' is positioned as a good role model – for her confidence, but also for being 'not tiny... not slim' (line 22), and being instead 'a nice chunky lady (.) lots of curves' (lines 22-23). Victoria Beckham is disparaged for her psychology and her look: 'I don't want anybody like Victoria Beckham (.) to be a role model for my daughter... because to look like that for most people is unrealistic... and she (.) she (.) she may have a lot of money and (.) y'know and fame and all the rest of it but (.) I wonder if she's happy' (lines 6-13).

This suggestion that Victoria Beckham's look is an unrealistic aim is interesting. At the start of this extract Dot is unequivocal in her condemnation. She says: 'pretty much everything about her (.) er (.) I don't like (.) I don't like what she stands for (.) and (.) and I suspect she's an incredibly insecure woman ... erm (.) but (.) I I don't like what she represents I don't like what she stands for and I don't want anybody like Victoria Beckham (.) to be a role model for my

daughter' (lines 1-7).

There is no weighing of imagined positive and negative qualities. This is a fairly one-sided presentation. This is quite a stark position for Dot to take up. Her next comment, to speak of what is realistic or not as a goal for others, does not counter the initial condemnation; but it does work to shift Dot's own stance from something that might appear overly critical and perhaps personally hostile, and realign her judgements as more fair and reasonable. This is now less of a personal critique, and more of an impersonal practical observation.

Similarly, when Dot queries Victoria's happiness (line 13) her comment mimics that from the interview with Mel quoted in the previous extract (27): 'I think she's just weird (.) but I think she's probably extremely unhappy' (lines 1-2). Both appear to function in a similar way. To position this 'failing' figure as unhappy discourages suggestions that a speaker might be jealous, or mean-spirited.

Dot contrasts Victoria Beckham's imagined insecurity and unhappiness with Nigella Lawson: 'now there's a confident lady' (line 21). Again we can see the now familiar patterns which suggest that marking out success and failure calls on concepts of having the right psychological, emotional, capital. Nevertheless, it is notable that it is also the 'body', its size and shape, around which much of the comparison between Nigella Lawson and Victoria Beckham takes place. But, there is a suggestion that the 'body' is standing in for something else here.

Looking across the set of interviews, suggests very strongly that being of such slim proportions is not inevitably disapproved in these interviews. The actress Audrey Hepburn for example (Figure 14) is lauded across the corpus; consistently described as ‘gorgeous’, ‘lovely’, ‘delicate’, and ‘dainty’. These extracts are typical.

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Figure 14. Audrey Hepburn, actress (1929-1993). (Original Title: Portrait Of Audrey Hepburn, 1960) Photo: Pictorial Parade/Getty Images. **Plate 21a** in Appendix E(1).

Extract 29.

[58:13/67:37]

- | | | |
|---|------|---|
| 1 | Mel | oh (.) oh she was beautiful (.) |
| 2 | Jean | yeah I think so |
| 3 | Mel | absolutely beautiful |
| 4 | Jean | and is just so elegant |
| 5 | Mel | gorgeous (.) yes she was lovely and so delicate |

Extract 30.

[45:23/78:03]

- 1 Sheila I just thought she was gorgeous (.) y'know (.) all the things I
2 wasn't
3 Jean would you have liked to have been like that?
4 Sheila don't think I've ever thought (.) no (.)
5 Jean mm
6 Sheila not really (.) but (.) she was so dainty and delicate and pretty
7 and (.) yeah

So, some women can pass muster when they are 'small'; some women cannot. What the comparisons between 'passing' constructions of Audrey Hepburn and 'failing to pass' constructions of Victoria Beckham show, is that 'failing' in this way is a complex intersecting weave. There appears to be something here about accountability: Victoria Beckham is being held morally responsible for her body. Implicitly, her own 'life project' is found wanting in the choices she makes. For the speakers here, it appears Victoria Beckham quite simply gets it wrong. In contrast, Nigella Lawson, Joanna Lumley, and Audrey Hepburn are particular kinds of subjects, constructed and reconstructed, produced and reproduced as getting it right.

The pattern on display here bears considerable similarity with the Skeggs' account of ethic and aesthetic in representations of class (Skeggs, 1997; 2004; 2005; 2008). Both Skeggs' data and mine here suggests a similar concern amongst speakers about who passes in the hierarchy of social capital, and who

fails; who is valued, and who is not.

For Skeggs this is understood through social class and the failing symbolic capital of the British working class woman in comparison to the values and capitals worked up she finds in middle class representations of self and (working class) others (Skeggs, 2005). In my data too it seems clear there is a process of classification taking place: but what kind of classification?

One could borrow from Skeggs to argue that this division could be organised along conventional class lines as a story of middle class ‘ownership’ of good taste, and working class pre-occupations with what is ‘respectable’. For example, both Nigella Lawson and Joanna Lumley have impeccable upper middle class credentials. Nigella Lawson is the daughter of Nigel Lawson, a former Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer 1983 – 1989, and Vanessa Salmon, heiress to the Lyons Corner House business empire.¹² Joanna Lumley was born in India in 1946, the daughter of a British Army major who was the fourth generation to serve in India with all the privilege of an important military family living a colonial life.¹³ Victoria Beckham, also known by her Spice Girls pseudonym, Posh Spice, also came from a wealthy family, the daughter of an electronics engineer who founded his own successful business.¹⁴ The difference then is not quite a conventional middle class/working class divide, but there is a sense of the *arriviste* (McRobbie, 2004) in the Beckhams’ success, an old-money/old-family and new-money/new-family distinction, an ‘authentic’ middle class versus, perhaps, a transitional class.

¹² <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1336420.stm>

¹³ www.telegraph.co.uk/news/features/3633679/Family-detective-Joanna-Lumley.html

¹⁴ www.imdb.com/name/nm0065751/bio

However; this is not made explicit in the talk. I am keen to avoid any sense of reification of class here – although I am perilously close. The point I want to take from sociological literatures is that the semiotics of class and classification are constructed and reconstructed in practices; and the practices of ‘classification’ appear to be on move – as one would predict in the changing economic structures of a post-industrial society (Oesch, 2006).

I am very reluctant therefore to deploy uncritically these labels of ‘working class’ and ‘middle class’. However, Skeggs makes a powerful and persuasive argument from her own data that speakers routinely divide subjects into a moral hierarchy of those exercising ‘good taste’ and those exercising ‘poor taste’ and ‘poor choice’; and that is apparent in my data too.

What this section has shown is that the process of imagining others as certain kinds of subjects is built in to the shared discursive resources for making sense of others, and for what constitutes the passing, that is successful, or the wanting, that is failing, subject. It has also suggested there are clear comparisons here with Skeggs’ findings on the pervasive concern with exercising good taste and good choice. What I want to show in the next section however is that this process of constructing imaginary, fantasy, others, is not simply a matter of socially shared meanings; nor indeed simply a product or producer of particular hierarchies of class capital and moral order. What gets imagined of the other is also deeply rooted in the personal history and personal orders and investments of the one doing the imagining.

7.2. Personal order investments in the fantastic other

What I want to show in this section is that what gets imagined of others is not simply a matter of circulating discursive resources, with one speaker after another passively repeating them as if they are nothing more than a particular kind of currency passed from one mouth to another. This is a recognisable criticism made of discursive studies in psychology; and in this section I want to illustrate that it is one for which a particular kind of discourse analysis in psychology has an emphatic rejoinder (Taylor, 2006). What gets picked up by a speaker is mediated through personal history and personal order; and these are enacted discursively.

Throughout the empirical chapters in this thesis I have been arguing for and demonstrating an analytic approach which follows Wetherell (1998; 2005a) and Billig (1999b; 1999c), and is both attentive to the sequential interaction of talk but is also attentive to the location of particular patterns of talk in bigger cultural resources. The underpinning argument for requiring this multiple focus, what Wetherell (2005a) calls the macro, meso, and micro forms of social order, is an ontological principle recognising that interaction happens simultaneously in macro, meso, and micro organisations of situated, contingent orders – semiotic organisations of the immediate interactional exchange, personal orders and larger cultural practices (Wetherell, 1998; 2005a). In this section I want to make use of Wetherell's proposed lens of personal order. My focus is on the way particular patterns in talk settle into meaningful intersecting patterns of personal order (Taylor, 2003; 2006; Wetherell, 2007) in which, to borrow Taylor's terms, constructions now are 'resourced by previous constructions which aggregate over time' (Taylor, 2006: 98).

For this section I am going to continue one of the themes of the last – appearance – this time focusing mainly on extracts from just one interview. Any of the interviews would have made equally good illustrative vehicles for this notion of personal investment and constructions of imaginary others. This is a discursive action accomplished in all the interviews. The interview I am drawing on, with a participant I have called Bridget, is particularly interesting here though because Bridget works in the beauty industry. This means it is possible to reasonably anticipate that Bridget’s personal order of discursive engagement is, at the very least, attuned to this concept of ‘appearance’, amongst, of course, many other ‘attunements’. In this next segment I want to show how some of these multiple attunements, the aggregated resources, unfold as Bridget constructs imaginary others.

Bridget was 45 at the time of the interview, married, with three children. She was living and working in an affluent semi rural district, and she was the senior partner in a jointly owned beauty salon. I will be arguing that this personal location, Bridget’s investments in her career and her family and the ideological dilemmas this deals out are enormously useful in explaining this notion of personal discursive order and its connections with the ‘fantasies’ of culturally produced others. I will be focusing on a selection of extracts featuring Bridget’s constructions of imagined others, and presenting an argument that Bridget is orientating to these others through the resources and concerns and investments of her own biography.

It is worth making a note about the method of data generation here because it does appear to influence what is said; but in a way which I think can be

defended. Using the photographs to help elicit talk means speakers are faced with generating some kind of account. This much is built into the method. However, participants were free to select whichever photographs they wanted to discuss. Several different selection styles were adopted by participants, such as spreading all the cards out and grouping them according to some participant category, or pulling out those of interest in an apparently haphazard manner. Some participants, like Bridget, gathered the photographs in a pile and worked through each image in turn, commenting on every one. However, what gets said is not discourse from ‘nowhere’. It can be situated and made sense of, and it gives insights into how selves and others are constructed.

Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online

At the start of this extract Bridget had been looking at the photograph here in Figure 15, a colour image of a woman with a tattoo on her arm and applying make up to her face. I am drawing attention to this because it sets the interactional context for what follows when Bridget turns her attention to the next image.

Figure 15. Make-up and tattoos. (Original Title: Tattooed Woman Applying Makeup, 2000) (Photographer: Monica Lau/Getty Images) **Plate 25** in Appendix E(1).

Extract 31.

[28:45/34:57]

1 Bridget tattoos and er (.) piercings (.) make up (.) I mean nothing like

2 this (.) fazes me because it's my world isn't it it's what I'm used
3 to I mean we have erm (.) transvestites coming here
4 transsexuals and (.) everybody aspiring to be (.) beautiful (.)
5 that's what I (.)

This extract opens with Bridget responding to the image in Figure 15, the tattoos, piercings and make up. She tells me 'nothing like this (.) fazes me because it's my world isn't it it's what I'm used to' (lines 1-3). This short sequence is full of the most extraordinarily rich action. The comment 'nothing like this (.) fazes me' suggests that some aspect of the image in the photograph is being orientated to as potentially strange, potentially unsettling. The figure in the image appears marked out as deviant in some way. It does not 'faze' Bridget, she tells us, but the implication appears to be that it may well disturb a different audience.

In addition, Bridget claims this world of the 'strange' as her own: 'it's my world isn't it it's what I'm used to' (lines 2-3). This establishes her expertise in this world and claims it as an aspect of her personal location, her personal biography. It is a position which she mobilises to fulfil the particular accounting task of this moment. This simple statement appears to accomplish an authority, a comfort and familiarity with this world Bridget has made strange for others, but ordinary for herself.

But this is not just a world for the strange and the deviant; this is a world of 'everybody aspiring to be (.) beautiful' (line 4). Again, there is cause to be circumspect about who 'everybody' might be, but it seems likely Bridget is referring to all those who enter her world of the beauty industry, and possibly

beyond. Nevertheless, what was constructed as unconventional and alien now, in ‘everybody’, also appears re-figured as ordinary, commonplace, unremarkable aspiration. That people ‘do’ aspire to be beautiful is not elaborated upon. This might indicate a taken for granted ideological quality that beauty simply *is* desirable. But it is important not to over-interpret and perhaps Bridget might have gone on to say more. However, as Bridget is speaking her attention appears to be caught by the next photograph, Kate Maclean (Figure 16). The extract continues from the last line of the previous:

Extract 32.

[29:02/34:57]

- 5 Bridget that’s what I (.) ((*Bridget picks up photo of Kate Maclean,*
6 *Figure 16*)) but she probably
7 had a lovely life(.) h-hh
8 Jean h-hh-hh
9 Bridget y’know people’d look at that
10 and think there’s no beauty
11 there she’s wrinkled up to the
12 eyeballs (.) y’know she’s
13 obviously had a hard life but
14 she’s been in the sun a lot and
15 that’s why her skin’s done
16 that (.) but I bet she’s er (.)
17 seen a lot of grandchildren



Figure 16. Miss Kate Maclean of Garrynamonie, South Uist, 1947.
Photographer: Werner Kissling. © University of Edinburgh – Dept. of Celtic and Scottish Studies.
www.scran.ac.uk **Plate 6** in Appendix E(1).

18 and had a lot of laughs and (.) had a lot of love round her family
19 (.) mm y'know (.)

Bridget imagines quite a detailed and, initially one might think, quite a personalised biography for Kate Maclean, as she mobilises a range of discursive resources for speculating about the woman in the photograph. Bridget suggests that here is a woman who 'probably had a lovely life' (lines 6-7); she is not beautiful, 'she's wrinkled up to the eyeballs... she's obviously had a hard life but she's been in the sun a lot and that's why her skin's done that (.) but I bet she's er (.) seen a lot of grandchildren and had a lot of laughs and (.) had a lot of love round her family' (lines 11-18). Again there is a wealth of social action contained in these few lines constructing this imaginary biography. What I am interested in is what the discursive achievements are here and what this might suggest about the personal order of the speaker, Bridget, in the way this figure is imagined.

At the moment the new image of Kate Maclean arises, Bridget has been working with a discursive framework of the world of the beauty salon, and 'everybody aspiring to be beautiful'. This is the discursive frame which is in play when Bridget comes to the figure Kate Maclean. Some kind of transition is required now as the talk moves to this next image; and this transition appears somewhat troubled. This is in part, I suggest, because of a residue from the previous theme of beauty, and an 'awkwardness' of fit with that frame for Bridget as she applies it to Kate Maclean. I say this for several reasons.

First, there appears to be a disjuncture. The 'but' of 'but she probably had a lovely life' (lines 6-7) suggests Bridget is making an interactional orientation, a

dialogic response, but to something that has not actually yet been said out loud. Bridget's previous comment 'that's what I' (line 5) appears to break off unfinished. This 'but' suggests something else has become rhetorically salient for Bridget. This is what Billig (1996) talks about when he says we can hear thinking in the way talk unfolds rhetorically. Something unsaid appears to be interactionally active for Bridget in the space between 'that's what I' and 'but' in lines 5 and 6. So what, for Bridget, might have preceded that 'but she probably had a lovely life'? What is she responding to?

Bridget's next comment provides some suggestions. She says: 'people'd look at that and think there's no beauty there' (lines 9-11). This, then, appears to be the previously unspoken dialogic charge against Kate Maclean which Bridget has been addressing. This, I think, is what the comment 'but she probably had a lovely life' is orientating to. Bridget mobilises a discourse of absence of beauty but projects it onto some general, unspecified 'others', that they – 'people' – would say 'there's no beauty there'. Bridget and I had been working within a discursive frame of 'beauty'; it appears to have seeped over into this next segment of talk, and was addressed by Bridget rhetorically but in such a way that distances Bridget from the charge being made, even though in this instance Bridget is the one mobilising it: it is Bridget for whom it is first salient here. But, Bridget counters the lack of beauty with a substitutive, perhaps compensatory, perhaps even trumping, 'lovely life' comprising grandchildren, laughter, love and family. While the notions of success and failure are not made explicit here these resources appear to be mobilised as a construction of what would make for a worthwhile life for a woman such as this. However, this construction of the 'lovely life' is itself

not trouble free and I will come to this shortly.

So far, this analysis could have been accomplished with a straightforward conversation analytic focus on the immediate sequential interaction, with no requirement to bring an analytic lens to a wider order. But that is about to change, in several ways.

It so happens that other participants address precisely this issue of Kate Maclean and whether there is beauty in her face. This short extract is simply to illustrate this point.

Extract 33.

[43:18/78:03]

- 1 Sheila now that you see I love old faces like that (.) I think (.) there (.)
2 that's beauty (.) as far as I'm concerned and all that life written
3 on that face

By coincidence, Sheila and I had also been working in a discursive frame of 'beauty' when Sheila pulled out this image for attention. We had been discussing the international competition 'Miss World' (see Plate 20, Appendix E(1)) before moving to the image of Kate Maclean. These words from Sheila as she looked at the new image, 'there (.) that's beauty as far as I'm concerned' (lines 1-2) demonstrate that there are resources available to construct Kate Maclean as a particular kind of beauty, 'old faces' (line 1) with 'all that life written on' them (lines 2-3). Perhaps Sheila is providing a contrast case here to the conventional (but clearly contestable) notion of beauty symbolised by the 'Miss World'

competition. Perhaps also Sheila recognises her position as possibly an unconventional interpretation. Nevertheless, the point is that in the course of unfolding interaction a range of ways of constructing Kate Maclean are demonstrated.

This suggests that in addition to the context of the images, and the discursive frame in play, there is also something in a speaker's personal order, which leads the interaction in a particular, contingent, way.

So, with this in mind I want to go back to Bridget and her constructions of Kate Maclean, and unpick this exchange a little further to look for indications of a personal order. I am going to be arguing that there are several threads to this personal order that unfold across Bridget's talk: her professional investments as a successful business woman and knowledgeable practitioner in the beauty industry; her interpellation into technologies and ideologies that say beauty is important; alongside her interpellation into an ideology which resists the importance of the 'look'. In addition Bridget is living out that central dilemma identified in chapter 5, the tensions in prioritising family whilst simultaneously identifying oneself as a (good) mother in paid employment. All of these themes can be seen flowing through Bridget's talk, interwoven and repeating as regular resources shaping our co-constructed sense-making across the interview.

I have suggested that deploying the notion of a 'lovely life' has countered the lack of beauty accredited to the image of Kate Maclean, and that this is not itself trouble free. Bridget begins to elaborate this 'lovely life' by drawing on an imagined history for Kate: 'she's obviously had a hard life but she's been in the sun↑ a lot and that's why her skin's done that' (lines 12-16). This diagnosis

reinforces Bridget's professional expertise and her position as a specialist. However, at the same time as it begins to explain Kate's beauty shortcomings, it also confirms them; they are being accounted for, not resisted, not rejected. While Kate Maclean fails, for Bridget, on any measure of beauty, Bridget nevertheless seems to be motivated to work up an identity for Kate which does pass. This alternative identity is one where old women are constructed as compensated for absent beauty and hard lives by family, grandchildren, love and laughter.

The fantasy biography raises several points. Bridget had little information about Kate Maclean to draw on. The photograph was labelled on the reverse as 'Miss Kate Maclean', which suggests no husband, children or grandchildren. However, Bridget may not have noticed this and there is nothing in the transcript to indicate she did.

Also striking is Bridget's prediction that Kate has had a lot of laughs and a lot of love. Compared to other participants' comments, these suggestions of 'laughs' and 'love' are an unusual reading of the photograph. Like Bridget, other participants speak of a 'hard life', 'toil', and 'poverty' in reference to this image; some also comment on the 'wrinkles'; and indeed several conjure an imaginary family for Kate Maclean, such as Sally's comment here:

Extract 34.

[83:31/124:45]

- | | | |
|---|-------|--|
| 1 | Sally | I would think she's been dealt (.) some tough times real tough |
| 2 | | times and I (.) y'know (.) she's probably again the mainstay |
| 3 | | she's |

4 Jean yeah

5 Sally probably the grandmother of th- y'know (.) the family

But, unlike Bridget, other participants do not use the discourse of the 'family' to overwrite the discourse of hardship, and conjure up love and laughter.

Extract 35.

[94:58/106:19]

1 Hannah I just hope I never grow up to look like that I really do

2 Jean in what way

3 Hannah erm (.) to y'know (.) to look sort of (.) so gnarled and erm (.) I

4 mean she looks like she's had a hard life

5 Jean yeah it's etched and

6 Hannah [yeah

7 Jean [yeah

8 Hannah y'know and er (.) and not a happy one

Drawing on these other participants' interpretations and my own, it seems to me that Bridget's suggestion of Kate Maclean's lovely life is a 'bad fit'.

This raises two questions. Why might Bridget have been motivated to construct this defence – this countering of the charge that Kate Maclean lacked beauty; and why was this notion of the lovely life of family, grandchildren, love and laughter recruited as the means to do it? I will take the second of these first.

For Bridget it appears that Kate Maclean has failed in any measure of

beauty. Bridget appears to be motivated to find an alternative way to fashion Kate Maclean where she does pass muster. The resources are telling and Billig's (1999a) notion of repression is very important here.

There is a readily available canonical quality to Bridget's story. This move by Bridget, the lovely life, family and grandchildren is a story that is 'ready to hand' and mobilised for the interactional task – to construct a commentary on an imagined other. In the process, it lays out a set of conditions for the redemption of age and wrinkles: family, love, and laughter. Moreover, its deployment pushes aside and represses a story of poverty and hardship.

Conjuring up this idealised, imaginary, 'acceptable', version of wrinkled old age for Kate is a means for Bridget to reconcile her own professional interests, and her personal commitments, with this other world of women like Kate Maclean. However, this version of 'acceptability' is conditional on family, love, and laughter as a trade off for failed beauty; and on sunshine as an excuse for wrinkles.

One could read family, love, and laughter as valued alternatives to a world of beauty and youth; this is, Bridget says, 'a lovely life' (line 7). But, the conditionality reproduces a range of demanding normative rules for 'passing'. This ill-fitting conditional, fantasised life story speaks quietly but firmly to the undesirability of aging, of being old, of wrinkles, of being single, of not having children, of not sharing laughter. Excusing Kate's 'absence of beauty' on these ill fitting grounds precisely reinforces the privileging of beauty; and moreover leaves the single, unmarried, childless, older, hardworking, female subject even more ideologically depleted. In the process of imagining a romanticised family, an

alternative life, perhaps a hard life of poverty and toil, is silenced and overwritten. But there is something else to glean here too.

Kate Maclean enters this extract depersonalised: ‘people’d look at *that*’ (line 9) and ‘there’s no beauty *there*’ (lines 10-11, my emphasis in both) are both ambiguous referents which may indicate the photo, or the body, the face, the person, and so on. Bridget’s imaginary account begins to put flesh to the bones of this woman looking out from the photograph. But the canonical quality of that fleshing out makes any ‘actual’ Kate Maclean living on this island of Uist in 1947, even less visible. This is not a story of ‘Kate Maclean’. What we have instead, are Bridget’s investments, her discursive resources, and the working though of her lived-life ideological tensions and strictures; and these are made visible in her manoeuvres through trouble, her projections on to Kate and her selection of one set of resources at the expense of another.

But, crucially, why am I saying this is a personal order as much as a social order? There are many similarities between what Bridget imagines for Kate Maclean and what other participants imagine, particularly in imagining her as a woman with family. Indeed, the underlying principle of shared communicative resources which runs throughout this thesis would expect that there might be such similarities. So, why posit this as anything more than social order? Does that not suffice? The answer, is that yes this is a social order, but it settles into a personal order too. And it makes its appearance in the way Bridget (as with other participants in other interviews) picks up a particular set of discursive patterns throughout her interview, as a series of repeating themes that intersect in relations with each other. This notion of the intersections of personal investments and

personal order are developed in this final extract, and this is the primary purpose for this extract. However, it is also useful for another reason. It demonstrates that the invented, fantasised other is not simply an artefact of the photographs but is embedded in the discursive resources for making sense of the world and oneself in that world. Two threads are being picked up for analysis: Bridget's investments in family worked up through the notion of the work-life balance; and a short but telling reference to the 'problem' Bridget constructs with the beauty industry which I will be reflecting back to some unfinished business in my analysis of Bridget's talk of Kate Maclean.

Just before this extract opens Bridget had been telling me that success for her has changed over the years; that at one time it would have been a big business, a house and car and such things but that having now achieved all of that, it is no longer as important as it was and sometimes she thinks about being at home looking after her house and children and family pets full time. Nevertheless, Bridget says, she still admires business success in other women.

Extract 36.

[2:28/34:57]

- 1 Bridget but then again I would look at- I will I would look at somebody
- 2 (.) and admire them (.) some women and admire them (.) and
- 3 actually if they are (.) sort of striving business women (.) I'll
- 4 probably look at them and admire and I'd think (.) I admire
- 5 what they're doing (.) and I don't really know how they've done
- 6 that (.) because (.) I know how difficult it is to do what (.) the

7 stage that I've got to (.)

8 Jean mm

9 Bridget and the sacrifices I've had to make in my personal life and my

10 family life (.) to get here (.)

11 Jean mm

12 Bridget so (.) I admire them for what they're doing (.) but at the same

13 time I wouldn't want to be them

14 Jean in what way

15 Bridget I think I'd probably look at somebody (.) y'know maybe I'm

16 comparing myself to other people in my business there's a lady

17 who owns (.) erm (.) an academy (.) in ((city)) where she's got a

18 training academy (.) and er (.) she's really big in the beauty

19 world (.) and she pushes and pushes and pushes and strives and

20 strives she's (.) she's had (her name) in all the publications we

21 get about the beauty she's well known and (.) all the rest of it (.)

22 erm (.) I could be wrong↑ (.) I don't know her personally I

23 could be wrong but I look at her and I think oh that must be

24 fantastic she's done really well and (.) y'know to have that

25 admiration from this wo::rld (.)

26 Jean mm

27 Bridget y'know to have done what she's done to be changing all the

28 training structure and all that sort of thing (.) erm (.) that must

29 be fantastic but at the same time (.) I- then I think what

30 sacrifices has she made what sort of life has she got to get that

[1 minute 59 seconds omitted where Bridget and I talk about the work women take responsibility for in their homes and the difficulties of achieving a balance. I ask Bridget if she can think of examples when this does not work out 'quite right'. Bridget returns to the example above of the businesswoman in the same industry]

31 Bridget there was a docu- there was a little programme on of her
32 recently (.) and she was seen buying these boots for four
33 hundred and fifty pounds in a shop (.) y'know and that's what
34 she (.) thinks is (.)

35 Jean mm

36 Bridget successful to be able to buy these boots (.) and I think that's the
37 problem with the industry that we're in (.) it's all seen as
38 materialistic it's all seen as what you look on the outside
39 y'know what shoes you're wearing and (.) everything on the
40 outside (.) and (.) I (.) look at her and in a way I feel quite sorry
41 for her because I think (.) yes she looks fantastic (.) she's got all
42 the right (.) equipment and toys and everything around her (.)
43 and (.) she's doing well within her job (.) and I would love to
44 know what's on the flip side of the coin (.) y'know what
45 sacrifices she's made for that (.) I doubt very much (.) that she's
46 got a happy marriage and a stable home life (.)

47 Jean yeh

48 Bridget she's probably had to sacrifice that for that

The extract begins with Bridget confirming that despite her changing priorities, she still admires businesswomen for what they are doing, knowing, she says, ‘how difficult it is to do what (.) the stage that I’ve got to ... and the sacrifices I’ve had to make in my personal life and my family life (.) to get here’ (lines 6-10). The tension between personal life and family life and professional life – which is what I understand Bridget to mean when she says ‘to get here’ – to this point in her business – picks up on precisely the dilemma discussed at length in chapter 5, a dilemma of managing multiple commitments, multiple positions and multiple accountabilities.

Being a mother, with a career, is a hugely fought over space of accountable identity. And, it is one Bridget is living out as she works up her ‘identity’ and meanings for me (and with me) in this interview. This is an ideological dilemma which holds her to ongoing account. It is one she interprets through the notion of sacrifice, that family and personal life must be sacrificed for career. Bridget then constructs a gap between herself and these other women she would admire: ‘so (.) I admire them for what they’re doing (.) but at the same time I wouldn’t want to be them’ (line 12-13).

Following my prompt, Bridget elaborates by telling me about another businesswoman working in the same industry. She constructs her as eminently successful. She is ‘really big in the beauty world’ (lines 18-19); has ‘had (her name) in all the publications’ (line 20); it ‘must be fantastic she’s done really well’ (line 23-24). A couple of minutes later when Bridget and I return to this same topic Bridget adds: she ‘looks fantastic (.) she’s got all the right (.) equipment and toys’ (line) and is ‘doing well within her job’ (lines 41-43). So,

this indicates one set of ways in which Bridget constructs success in her field. But, Bridget also appears to limit this as a partial success only: ‘I could be wrong↑ (.) I don’t know her personally I could be wrong but I look at her and I think’ (lines 22-23), ‘what sacrifices has she made what sort of life has she got’ (lines 29-30).

Here then, Bridget is seen constructing this business colleague through a reproduction of her own personal commitments to a particular kind of work-life balance; one which she interprets though a notion of sacrifice; and one which she projects onto her fantasy of this other woman. And this goes to some lengths: despite having constructed this other woman as so successful in her field, Bridget says: ‘in a way I feel quite sorry for her’ (lines 40-41), which she explains by saying ‘I doubt very much (.) that she’s got a happy marriage and stable home life’ (lines 45-46).

Apart, of course, from the constructions of business success alongside speculations of relationship failures for this other, Bridget is also doing much identity work for herself as she positions herself in relation to the way she imagines this other woman. She has constructed a professional distance between herself and her colleague. This other woman is presented as out performing her. But, by undermining that success, by suggesting it has come at the price of imagined failure in marriage and home, Bridget is able to re-fashion her *own* achievements. She is the successful one because she is the one that has the balance right; she has the business and the home life. When Bridget says ‘I feel quite sorry for her’ (lines 40-41) she is claiming a more advanced form of success

for herself. As Bridget positions herself and this other businesswoman in relation to each other, the other is to be pitied.

In response to my questions and to the photo images, Bridget is working hard to construct for me and with me a particular version of herself. An important resource is the fantasy image; this imagined possibility of her rival's inadequate home life. But this 'damaged success' the sacrificed home life, is not plucked from nowhere. It is typical of the tensions around work and home life illustrated in chapter 5. These are shared cultural discourses. But, it is also consistent with concerns Bridget expresses throughout her interview.

In constructing this 'damaged success' lived by her business colleague, Bridget appears to work up a dialogic projection of her own conflicts and dilemmas. This imaginary other becomes a site to work through them and test them out in different ways.

I want to look at one last segment of this extract, the moment when Bridget says 'I think that's the problem with the industry that we're in (.) it's all seen as materialistic it's all seen as what you look on the outside' (lines 36-38). At the same time I want to revisit a query I raised earlier about why Bridget might have anticipated a dialogic charge that there was no beauty in the image of Kate Maclean, why she might have been motivated to defend it, and why a discourse of a lovely life of family love and laughter was the discursive mechanism for doing that.

Bridget is problematising the beauty industry here for its focus on appearances. But, as part of that industry, Bridget is potentially implicated herself in this criticism. Therefore, there is a personal investment in distancing herself

from this ‘problem’ of her industry and working up alternative ‘values’ for judging a successful life.

So, when the image of Kate Maclean (Figure 16) is presented in immediate proximity to Figure 15, in response to which Bridget had staked her claim and authority in the beauty world, Bridget is reflexively, rhetorically, motivated to ‘defend’ Kate Maclean and reconstruct her in a valued image. Bridget’s response to Kate Maclean, potentially ill-fitting as it might have been, draws on one of the resources in Bridget’s personal order that is routinely worked up as something she both values *and* uses to strengthen her position as she constructs comparisons with others such as this businesswoman here who Bridget imagines must be lacking in these valued markers of a successful life for a woman.

This appears to be one facet of Bridget’s ‘personal order’. It is born of combining culturally available resources and habitual dilemmas. This personal order is not a projection of a private unconscious and dynamic world of fantasy, but a publicly shared world of publicly shared readily available dialogues. These are the common, routinely deployed repertoires of a cultural time, space, and local moral order. But, in addition, they have settled as a set of discourses regularly called upon and inhabited by Bridget. They are also the common, routinely deployed repertoires of her personal order.

7.3 Chapter summary and conclusions

This section has brought the narrative of the thesis to a particularly interesting point. Exploring and accounting for speakers’ fantasised, imagined version of

others has illustrated a range of socially shared cultural resources in play, such as the moral organisations of subjects into hierarchies of cultural value: those subjects ‘getting it right’ and those ‘getting it wrong’. In the process of arguing that order is also rooted in personal concerns however, I have also worked up an analysis of what that personal order looks like as it unfolds in the interaction here.

A substantial and often voiced critique of the Foucauldian influenced discursive subject has been that it struggles to account for personal order, for individual differences in the take up of one discourse or another. This has formed a central component of the psychoanalytic psychosocial argument in particular. To counter that argument Wetherell (2007) has proposed that attention to the repeating patterns in individual discursive practice, examined at the macro, meso and micro level of social order is a potentially highly productive means of addressing this critique.

What I have tried to show here is that the notion of personal order and investments proposed by Wetherell (2005b), the notion of a biography and life history being taken seriously, to borrow Hollway and Jefferson’s phrase (2000:136) is entirely achievable in a discursively driven psychosocial psychology without the requirement to incorporate a psychoanalytic reading of the person to do it – contrary to Hollway and Jefferson’s insistence.

What this analysis of the patterns in imagining others is starting to illustrate is that the ‘individual’ produces and reproduces a personal order – the sediment of investments and concerns, in interaction.

So, while notions of imagination and fantasy and projection have a long history in psychoanalytic work and psychoanalytically inspired psychosocial

theory, I am bracketing off any notions of privately organised, unconscious but directing and distorting defence mechanisms; and instead exploring projection as a thoroughly discursive practice. By this I mean that when people try to make sense of or from an object, they will project onto it, assign to it, their own historically situated and habituated concerns. Speakers work up understandings through the discursive resources they have at their disposal and apply these resources to sites and objects that unfold in interaction. Their concerns, interests and investments are revealed as these are projected on to their unfolding commentaries and interactions.

Moreover, these repeating patterns in projections say something about the speaker's own narrative identity and investments, drawn as it is from available cultural resources - such as the canonical 'family' stories Bridget projected onto Kate Maclean and the business acquaintance. These normative family stories are practiced over time, ready to hand, and dropped into the talk to solve Bridget's reflexive accounting problem. They require little discursive work on Bridget's part. The ease of speaking here testifies both to the cultural dominance of these themes - they have a taken for granted quality as they organise a moral world, and to the personal privilege these discourses exercise in the habits of Bridget's sense-making and working through of her own dilemmatic positions.

I will be continuing this exploration of personal order and the psychosocial in the next chapter. This time however, I will be working with a different kind of data, data which is particularly productive for teasing out the intricacies of personally ordered interaction and which allows for an extension of this notion into the developments and deployments of *interpersonal* orders.

Chapter 8. Interpersonal orders and the habits of engagement

In previous chapters I have been trying to capture patterns which run across the corpus in order to say something about shared cultural resources and how they are deployed to work up identities of success or failure. Throughout, though, there have been hints towards the playing out of continuities and personal orders in the way discursive patterns connect and repeat for particular speakers. The last chapter started to bring that into focus more clearly. In this final empirical chapter I want to extend the notion to *interpersonal* order. I will be exploring some of the patterns that run through one interview with two sisters interviewed together, so that I can say something more about the interpersonal order, and the sisters' relational habits of engagement suggested in this tale.

This data, from a paired interview, contrasts with the material in the three previous chapters which drew mostly on data from typical one-to-one interviews. A one-to-one framework, despite invoking some constraints such as normative expectations that accounts will be generally coherent, and broadly in line with the questions asked, still leaves participants fairly free to 'speak' themselves in ways of their choosing within the discursive resources they have available. My interview style is of course collaborative in this. I rarely challenge participants' accounts in our co-constructions.

In this chapter I want to look at what happens when participants are asked instead to account for themselves in these terms of success and failure in front of someone who knows them well, with whom they have an ongoing relationship,

and who has their own versions of the history of events, and their own investments in the way accounts are worked up. This different interactional, relational, figuration opens up some important methodological and empirical insights about accounting and identity practices. It provides opportunity for developing theoretical potential around the relational interplay of shared histories and invested, habituated, personal and interpersonal logics and practices of making 'successful' or 'failing' identities. It also provides an opportunity to investigate some alternative ways of taking up the various recommendations to take personal history seriously (Crossley, 2000; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000b; Taylor, 2005; Wetherell, 2007). As before, this will be without invoking privately owned psychoanalytic psychodynamics. Rather, it continues to work with resources from discursive psychology (Taylor, 2005; 2006).

In addition this data exploring the interpersonal orders of two adult sisters speaks to an area of study increasingly recognised to be under-represented in the literature: adult sibling relationships. As recent critiques point out (Edwards, Hadfield, Lucey, Mauthner, 2006; Sanders, 2004), what is written about siblings comes from a narrow range of standpoints, often problem focussed with assumptions of a need for therapeutic intervention, and often disregarding of adult identity, relationality, and intersubjective adult practices. The data for this chapter provides an opportunity to make a contribution here too.

I begin in 8.1. by capturing a flavour of the data. I make some brief comparisons between the accounts the sisters offer and introduce some key themes for the chapter as the two sisters work up troubled and untroubled identities of success in the knowledge and presence of each other. In section 8.2. I

consider briefly some of the sibling relationships literature which will make useful interlocutors for this chapter. The next section, 8.3., examines one of the main stories of success and failure worked up in the interview here: the sisters' different careers in banking. Their different trajectories tell of remarkable success for one and struggle and difficulty for the other. In 8.4. I explore the notion of interpersonal order practiced in the interview. This examines a phenomenon I am calling the 'habits of engagement'. The two women construct and enact a repeating pattern of taking up and taking over each other's subject positions and narrative capitals. At the same time, a repeating problematic of recognition and misrecognition is made visible, both as it occupies the sisters' talk, and as it offers tentative explanatory possibilities for that talk.

As a final precursor to this chapter, I offer a note on the pseudonyms in use: Olivia and Yvonne. Because of the similarities in the sisters' accounts, there is a complexity in this chapter for the reader trying to easily distinguish the two women. I have adopted a simple mnemonic. 'Olivia' is the Older sister; 'Yvonne' is the Younger sister. This chronological relationship is also analytically relevant throughout the chapter. It is hoped this simple mnemonic will assist in keeping track of the biographical accounts that unfold here without causing any unnecessary distraction.

8.1. Data and focus

I want to begin by capturing a flavour of the accounts on which this analysis is based. Both sisters have pursued the same career trajectory in banking; but with very different results, according to the content of their narratives. One account is

an ‘easy’ story of success; one is a story of trouble. This difference is one of the central hooks for my analysis.

The first extract is from Yvonne, the younger sister. It comes at an early point in the interview and Yvonne is talking about her job as a bank manager.

Extract 37.

[02:12/150:53]

- 1 Yvonne y’know it’s what I’ve always wanted to do (.) and (.) part of the
2 reason I love my job is because I’m so proud
3 Jean mm
4 Yvonne that I’m the:re (.) and that I’ve done it and (.) I do love my job
5 (.) and (.) yeah I admit it y’know if someone says to me what do
6 you do (.) and I say I’m a bank manager
7 Jean ye:ah
8 Yvonne yeah I’m proud of saying that

This fragment typifies the ready ease with which Yvonne was able to mobilise a story of success drawing on her employment as a bank manager. This particular identification was a resource Yvonne reiterated many times throughout the interview.

As a contrast, the second extract is from Olivia, the older sister. Olivia had also entered banking, but during the interview presents a more troubled account. In this extract which comes from a point towards the end of the interview Olivia is summarising some of the ways an account of her life might be

viewed.

Extract 38.

[125:32/150:53]

- 1 Olivia I mean (.) a lot of people would look at me and probably say I
2 wasn't a success because (.) divorced (.) didn't hack it as a
3 branch manager (.) still living at home with parents (.) but from
4 my point of view (.) came out of an abusive marriage (.) severe
5 clinical depression where I tried to commit suicide (.) luckily I
6 didn't (.) to a place where I'm (.) happy with myself (.) strong
7 again

These few lines capture a summary of the narrative recounted by Olivia. It is quite different in comparison to Yvonne's account although of course the two interactional tasks are also quite different. Here, Olivia is providing a 'review' which occurs after more than two hours of interview talk. Yvonne's task in the previous extract was to provide an 'introduction', coming as it did in the opening minutes of the interview. Despite the chronological separation, these two extracts capture much that occupies the sisters' combined accounting in this interview. Olivia's account summarises a story of troubled positions, or at least, positions Olivia orientates to as hearably troubled: she says 'a lot of people would look at me and probably say I wasn't a success' (lines 1-2). Olivia suggests some reasons why, but then changes footing to counter this position: 'but from my point of view' (lines 3-4). But, the contrasts Olivia makes in these two footings highlights

one of the dilemmas Olivia is faced with in accounting for herself in terms of success and failure. Narratives are always in relation to other possible narratives that could be told, other versions. This is the rhetorical, ideological, dialogic nature of language. But, this has a particular significance in the context of Olivia's account of trouble because it sits in such close proximity to, and contrast to, her younger sister's celebratory account. This notion of proximity provides the second hook for this chapter. The accounts from one sister are constrained by the actual and anticipated intervention of the other sister. Both sisters have some knowledge of approximately the kind of account each other has to offer and the kinds of ways that might be received. There is a history of shared knowledge and rehearsed ways of telling, and this knowledge shapes what they can say, and how they can say it.

So, to open this chapter I am drawing on the notion of contrasting trajectories in two stories and how this is complicated by the interactional task set the two sisters; to work up constructions of their successes and failures with me, and in the reactive presence of each other.

8.2. Sibling literatures and theoretical options

I also want to assemble some thoughts from sibling literature to take into this chapter. Recent discussions suggest that the field of sibling research is underdeveloped, both theoretically and empirically (Edwards *et al.*, 2006; Mauthner, 2002; Sanders, 2004). Mauthner's (2002) work on sistering is an important development in addressing this gap. However, I just want to clarify something of my understanding of this gap. Mauthner argues that sistering has no

language:

...the lack of public representation of sistering explains the absence of a language with which women can narrate the sistering aspects of their lives.
(Mauthner, 2002:14)

I suggest that Mauthner perhaps conflates too many issues when she makes this claim. Her own empirical work is markedly at odds with the idea that women are unable to narrate sistering aspects of their lives. I agree when Mauthner argues that there are clear differences in the power and privilege attached to notions and consequential practices of brotherhoods in comparison to sisterhoods. She points out that familial brotherhood is as little researched as familial sisterhood. However, as she also argues, the notion and function of brotherhoods in powerful, patriarchal, areas of social and political life such as the military, pubs and clubs, industries and secret organisations such as the Freemasons etc., are much more visible than any similar concepts of sisterhoods.

This is certainly a fair comment. But, in attempting to quite rightly draw attention to gendered imbalances in privilege and power, Mauthner does some injustice to the many traditions in sisterhoods by denying them their 'language'. The sites of sistering language practices are abundant. There are long traditions for example in nursing, in religious vocations of nuns, and many other groups such as the Union of Catholic Mothers, and the Women's Institute, and so on. There is also, of course, the concept of 'sisterhood', both so integral and so contentious to feminist movements (hooks, 1997[1984]). I accept Mauthner's

assessment that these sites function firmly in reduced power relations compared to the concomitant brotherhoods in these patriarchal institutions of medicine, church, and the idealised family. So, while I agree with Mauthner that sisterhoods may lack visibility in many sites, and have been undervalued in research agendas, I contend that ethnomethodologically *sisters* do not lack a language of narration. What has been made of that language is a separate issue.

Siblings have been the subject of research, but in a particularly restricted way. Sibling relationships are recognised as commonplace, but rarely examined as specific relationships. Edwards *et al.* (2006) and Sanders (2004) report that psychology has concentrated largely on testing correlates of birth order, often in terms of education and career outcomes. This is somewhat sterile though in its ability to illuminate ongoing intersubjective understandings and relational practices.

Then, they also point out that in family therapy research siblings are pre-figured as a subset of the family system and any ‘dysfunction’ – family therapy is a problem-based approach – any dysfunction is treated as a dysfunction of the family system as a whole. Particular relationships within the family, such as siblings, are not explored outside of the whole (family) system, and interventions are not separable from parental relations. Of course, it makes sense to say that sibling relationships are embedded in family, and indeed many other relationships; but sibling relationships are also worked up in moment to moment, specific, interpersonal interactions together. This lens is generally missing from family therapy readings of siblings.

Social policy agendas also consider siblings in terms of parent-child

relationships, attentive in particular to notions of obligations, responsibilities, entitlements and care. There is no specifically sibling focussed social policy (Edwards *et al.* 2006; Mauthner, 2002).

Generally, as Sanders (2004) and others have noted, any attention which is directed to sibling relationships originates in clinical approaches to ‘trouble’, and not to any normative sense of sibling relationships. This is certainly the case in psychoanalysis although psychoanalytic approaches have also largely directed attention towards the impact of siblings on the parent-child relationship rather than sibling-sibling (Sanders, 2004). Where sibling relationships are explored directly it tends to be through a theory of rivalry and unconscious desires to destroy the sibling; and all this located in the individual. Typically, this universalising approach lacks attention to the particular situated and local specificities of the relationship.

More recent psychoanalytically inflected psychosocial models of sibling relationships do recruit notions of cultural specificities and social productions of meaning (see Lucey, 2009, for example). Lucey places the family at the forefront of this notion of the social, arguing that of all contexts it is in our relations with family that ‘we come to make sense of ourselves and the world in which we live’ (Lucey, 2009, in press).

Lucey’s (2009) study of two brothers aged thirteen and nine explores the way in which these two boys work up and live out identities within the intimate relations of close familial others. Her approach is psychoanalytically driven, but discursively inflected. The two boys were interviewed separately and their talk about their relationship is analysed by Lucey as a story of unconscious

dependency and ambivalence; a desire for separation interwoven with accounts of shared pleasure in the other.

Lucey argues that what characterises contemporary western experience are the conflicting desires to be recognised as unique and special at the same time as one is recognised as belonging to a caring collective. This tension, she proposes, holds the brothers in simultaneously aggressive, envious, but mutually dependent psychic positions. This is worked up in Lucey's analysis through a notion of space as the physical space the boys argue over, such as their bedrooms, and the (unconscious) psychical space they contest in the family order. For Lucey this contest of claiming space is a contest for ownership of and dominion over the physical place of the bedroom, which is itself an unconscious mirroring of a contest for owning, belonging, indeed being connected to psychical space in the family.

I want to draw on Taylor's (2003) work here because, coming from a very different, narrative-discursive, approach, it provides a different way of thinking about this idea of connecting to space, location, and discursive connections to place. Taylor's study of identity work and talk about place has illustrated talk of place as a discursive means of establishing a sense of self, of continuity, of belonging within successive generations of a family, or indeed, not belonging. This talk of place is a complex, nuanced, working up of identity, of meaning-making of self and others. It is talk of being located; but crucially for my arguments here, it does not require theories of 'psychical' space.

Both the concept of a desire for recognition, and the notion of space and place, are particularly salient for my own analysis. Like Taylor, I prefer to think

of space-place-location discursively, in terms of subject positions; the discursive, narrative claims to being particular kinds of subjects, to working up particular kinds of subjectivity and identity. This removes any dependence on a psychoanalytic psychosocial approach for offering an explanation of what is happening in this dispute over territory in Lucey's analysis. There seems to be no requirement to locate the source of territorial tension within internal distorted needs and desires of the individual. The struggle for recognition takes place in the recruitment and receipt of shared meanings. The notion of positions, worked up in the deployment of interpretative repertoires and narratives, accomplishes this work for us, without recourse to an internally, privately owned, unconscious motor. Where perhaps I use 'place' differently to Taylor in this particular instance of my study of the two sisters, is the idea of 'place' not as a means of constructing an identity from the discursive resources of geographical location, but from a 'competition' for the momentary interactional occupation of a particular subject position 'space' – which in this chapter is to be illustrated through the idea of the favourite grand-daughter, the academically gifted sister, the successful bank manager. So, I am borrowing the notion of the importance of 'place' and 'space' from Taylor and Lucey, but applying it to the 'spaces' available in interactional co-constructions of available subject positions, and who gets to occupy those subject spaces.

This psychosocial contribution to the sibling literature by Lucey (2009; see also Edwards *et al.*, 2006) has been enormously valuable for opening up new ways of understanding the interconnectedness of sibling relationships and the constructive work siblings themselves do in organising their understandings and

meanings. But, like many others, Lucey treats the psychosocial as if it inherently means a psychoanalytic reading. Many other alternatives are available (Andrews *et al.*, 2000). My approach to the psychosocial borrows from those versions which locate the constitution and semiotics of sibling relationships within discourses, not within individuals (see Billig, 1999a; Wetherell, 2005b).

My work in this chapter will be tackling a similar kind of material to Lucey: like her discussion of two brothers, I focus here on two sisters. However, there is an important operational difference as well as a different analytic approach. The brothers in Lucey's study are interviewed apart, and their words integrated in analysis. The two sisters in my study are interviewed together, and *they* integrate their words in the talk that emerges. This provides a clearer opportunity for exploring the way in which the sisters make sense of themselves *together* in the context of success and failure.

8.3. Analytic lenses

Drawing on fiction, myth, and folklore, Sanders (2004) suggests there are four common sibling discourses; repertoires of alliance, rivalry, difference, and a fourth which draws on family tales of all-female or all-male. It would certainly have been possible to write this chapter around any of the first three of these themes, either as interpretative repertoires in use, or as explanatory frameworks taken from psy-complex discourses.

Extract 39.

[41:15/150:53]

- 1 Yvonne I'm not- we're not friends now (.) we we
2 Olivia we're sisters (.) I mean we're alright now (.)
3 Yvonne yeah (.)
4 Olivia and you think family (.) chips are down pull to- I mean (.) we
5 will (.) rally round and there's a wall there and nobody's
6 coming through it
7 Jean yeah
8 Olivia but on a day to day basis (.)
9 Yvonne we have no (.) we have no interests alike (.)
10 Olivia yeah ((*laughter*)) (.) we are chalk and cheese (.) completely
11 [different
12 Yvonne [it's like (.) even down to when we were kids (.) you were just
13 I'm sorry you were horrible (.) you were you were you were a
14 bully for starters (.) that bully ((*unclear overlapping speech*))
15 Olivia I were having a brother and my granddad (.) said I'll have my
16 brother you know it were going to be a boy (.) and she wasn't
17 Yvonne but then I [grew up and
18 Olivia [and she gave my doll chicken pox
19 Jean sorry (.) she
20 Olivia she gave my doll chicken pox ((*laughter*))
21 Yvonne she had to have everything perfect (.) so
22 Olivia this is the difference between us I was always (.) you need to
23 ask my mum I was always like (.) I had this doll and it were

24 perfect (.) all my toys were perfect (.) whereas (.) Yvonne was a
25 a right little tomboy she didn't mind if it were broken or (.)
26 whatever

The 'difference' repertoire is clearly illustrated here: 'we are chalk and cheese (.) completely different' (lines 10-11). It is elaborated with an example: 'all my toys were perfect (.) whereas (.) Yvonne was a a right little tomboy she didn't mind if it were broken' (lines 24-25). This repertoire of 'difference' is a theme picked up many times across the interview. Following the study of the two brothers cited above, Lucey (2009) indicates that establishing 'difference' in this way can be read as evidence for an underlying psychic drive to separation, through unconscious projections. This means unwanted aspects of the self are imaginatively transferred to the convenient sibling. One may then understand oneself as different, as not in possession of that undesirable quality. To maintain this difference is to psychically repress intolerable aspects of the self (see Benjamin, 1995).

However, while projection and repression are interesting resources here, there is no requirement to posit an internally located unconscious motor. The 'difference' is constructed entirely in the repertoire of difference; a normative framework for working up relations of difference entirely commensurate with a western ethic of reflexive individualisation.

Sanders (2004) also suggested a repertoire of alliance as one of the primary ways of making sense of family relations. In the extract above the sisters combined a repertoire of difference with a repertoire of alliance: 'family (.) chips

are down pull to- I mean (.) we will (.) rally round and there's a wall there and nobody's coming through it' (lines 4-6). This could easily be framed in Lucey's terms as an account of dependence; the same account of combined separation and dependence she argued in her own analysis of the two brothers. But again, an internal psychic motor is not necessary for understanding what work is being undertaken here.

The sisters have been telling a tale of difference, and indeed dislike of each other; they have been taking up positions of separation. This repertoire of alliance functions to reposition them both, to repair 'separation' and 'difference' to fit another discursive norm for meaning making; a conventional discursive expectation that family pulls together in a crisis. This movement is the same negotiation of competing dilemmas observed throughout the thesis. As one position – difference and separation – is mobilised another, similarity and cohesion and alliance, is indexed. The sisters are able to co-construct both.

The third repertoire Sanders identified was one of rivalry. While the sisters do not describe themselves as 'rivals' they do construct accounts of competition for attention and recognition which I discuss below (see section 8.5.). In some theoretical traditions, particularly psychoanalytic and to some extent family therapy (Sanders 2004) it might be tempting to use the accusation of bullying (lines 13-14), and the damaged doll, 'she gave my doll chicken pox' (line 18), as evidence of internal rivalries played out in practice. I will be arguing that these exchanges do not need to be read as subtle evidence of unconscious hatreds, but instead, as the take up of jostling, argumentative, rhetorical, habituated, commonplace positionings.

This short illustration shows already that it would be entirely possible to organise the chapter around an illustration of these kinds of discourses. However, rather than map out general repertoires of sistering, I am more interested in this chapter in the way certain resources sediment into particular *interpersonal orders*, the intersubjective, relational, ethnomethodological habits of engagement between two particular sisters working up and living out relational identities. Of course, this draws on and reproduces interpretative repertoires and ideological dilemmas and so on, insofar as speakers mobilise them to complete their interactional business. But my interest here is in the notion of sedimenting orders; what Lucey (2009) calls a ‘habituality of practice’, but which is developed in this chapter without the concept of an internally managed, privately owned psyche that Lucey calls on as the motor for this habituality.

This focus on sedimenting interpersonal orders means that whereas a particular focus of discourse analysis in psychology is on language as the unit of analysis (see chapter 4) rather than a particular individual or individuals as the unit(s) of analysis; in this chapter on interpersonal orders I am trying to find a means of reading the way collections of language-in-use are organised into some sort of habituated use for particular speakers. In other words, here the unit of analysis is the interpersonal order between the two women as it is mobilised for the interactional demands of the interview accounts, and as it appears to say something important about lives *beyond* the interview. The focus is still on the ethnomethodological practices; but a combined personal-interpersonal, historical, practice, one which is interactionally situated, but carries elements of past and future use (Taylor, 2005; 2006).

8.4. Stories of success and failure.

The interpretative understandings I develop in this analysis draw on wider sequences of interaction beyond the specific extracts cited here. Therefore some account of these wider interactions will be useful. The biographical details are drawn from the accounts offered in the interview. In an attempt to maintain anonymity some details have been changed or omitted, such as names and places. I have attempted to preserve the details of the relationship between the two women but I acknowledge that this is a partisan process: possibly the details changed carry resonances for the participants, or readers, which I have overlooked. However, I have scrutinised the changes made and am confident these have not adversely affected the analytic account I have provided.

I was aware of Olivia as a volunteer member of the organising committee for a social club I used to attend, although we had never met. I had approached her to ask if she would be interested in taking part in my study and left information about the project with her which included the note that I was interviewing women alone or in pairs if they preferred, with a partner of their choice (see Appendix A and B). I telephoned Olivia a few days later and she said she would be happy to take part, and asked me if I would be interested in interviewing her sister as well. I said yes.

Both sisters lived on the same street in an affluent district where property prices were above average for the town. Olivia, whom I had approached first, was the older sister, aged 37. Following a divorce two years earlier Olivia had returned to the family home and was living with her retired parents. Yvonne was younger, 33, married and living with her husband and their three children aged 7

years, 3 years, and 5 months. The women's physical appearance was quite different. This was a point they addressed themselves, mostly in general terms simply as a point of 'difference', although on occasions Yvonne made more direct mention of her size. This description here though is mine. Olivia, the older sister was shorter, slim, with dark hair worn in a short crop, petite features and a serious, thoughtful, perhaps stern, expression. Yvonne, her younger sister, was taller, heavily overweight to the extent she appeared to have difficulty walking; she had long red hair, a highly expressive face and a ready smile.

We met at Olivia's home where we had planned to conduct the interview. Olivia's parents were both present with Olivia when I arrived. Yvonne, her younger sister, was also already there. One of the family (my field notes do not record who), suggested we might have more privacy if we went to Yvonne's house instead, which we did. This re-location from Olivia's house to Yvonne's bears interesting parallels with the way the interview narrative unfolded, both in the life events reported, and in the particular discursive deployments used. There is a recurrent pattern in the accounts the sisters gave whereby positions and narratives occupied by one sister are claimed and taken up by the other to quite an extraordinary degree. Where one sister occupies a position – such as Olivia's position as participant and host for the interview – the second sister will also adopt – or be adopted into – that position too: as a second participant and the new host. I will point to more of these movements below as an integral feature of my analysis.

I move now to drawing out the contrasting accounts of their careers the two sisters offer: one a readily recognisable untroubled account of success; the

other a more complicated and precarious account of difficulties faced. For ease of reference I just want to point again to the device I use at the start of each extract [xx:xx/yy:yy] identifying its location within the interview overall. This allows each extract to be understood in chronological relation to the others. This next extract for example begins one minute 33 seconds into the recording. Up to this point I had prefaced the interview in typical fashion, thanking the sisters for taking part, reminding them the interview was being recorded, and that they could stop the recording at any time. I continue:

Extract 40.

[01:33/150:53]

- 1 Jean so just to start (.) a really general question (.) if you think about
2 that notion of success (.) and failure (.) and being good enough
3 (.) for you what does that conjure up
4 Yvonne ((*laughter*)) do you mean personally
5 Jean ok (.) yeah
6 Yvonne personally (.) hh (.) about me- I don't know- because what I see
7 is (.) I was (.) perceiving it that you're querying- so it's like
8 what what am I happy about with my life [and what I'm not (.)
9 so (.)
10 Jean [mm
11 Yvonne I am really (.) proud that I'm a bank manager
12 Jean yeah
13 Yvonne y'know it's what I've always wanted to do (.) and (.) part of the

- 14 reason I love my job is because I'm so proud
- 15 Jean mm
- 16 Yvonne that I'm the:re (.) and that I've done it and (.) I do love my job
- 17 (.) and (.) yeah I admit it y'know if someone says to me what do
- 18 you do (.) and I say I'm a bank manager
- 19 Jean ye:ah
- 20 Yvonne yeah I'm proud of saying that

My question was addressed to both sisters (although even with field notes I can confirm few of the visual cues such as eye contact or gestures by or to one or other speaker). The extract shows Yvonne was the first to take up my question and she began by clarifying the task, 'do you mean personally' (line 4). In lines 7 and 8, Yvonne performs the same act of translation from 'success' to 'happiness' illustrated in chapter 6, 'so it's like what what am I happy about with my life and what I'm not' (lines 7-8); and then tells me about her pride in her job as a bank manager. This is a highly effective start for Yvonne in negotiating the accounting task at hand. Immediately she is able to position herself as professionally and psychologically successful. In this short piece she iterates and reiterates her pride (lines, 11, 14, and 20), and her job title (lines 11 and 18). Her pride is placed in her achievement: 'part of the reason I love my job is because I'm so proud ...that I'm the:re (.) and that I've done it' (lines 13-16). But, Yvonne also explicitly presents her job title as a source of pleasure when used as a way of identifying herself to people, 'and (.) yeah I admit it y'know if someone says to me what do you do (.) and I say I'm a bank manager... yeah I'm proud of saying that' (lines

17-20).¹⁵

This practice of 'identification' is reminiscent of Paula's talk from the beginning of chapter 5. There Paula and I shared a co-construction of the trouble inherent in addressing this 'what do you do' question from others, and what kinds of answers might pass. Both Paula and I had orientated to 'housewife' as an 'inadequate' answer (see page 160, lines 140-149). Yvonne also implicitly picks this up. She is able to answer the question in quite different terms: 'I'm a bank manager... I'm proud of saying that' (lines 18-20). Notably, both women, Yvonne here and Paula earlier, orientate to this kind of identity accountability as an ordinary everyday occurrence. Moreover, the identity positions one has available in response are recognised as a lived problem, a form of positioning which carries evaluative consequence.

Yvonne is able to cram even more successful positioning into this short extract though. She says being a bank manager is 'what I've always wanted to do' (line 13). This adds another layer of success on success: not only is she in a career which gives her pride; but it is presented as the fulfilment of lifelong desire.

A similar feature in talk was identified by Taylor and Littleton (2006) in their 'Creative Journeys' project on artists' accounts of their lives. Their analysis pointed to the way speakers construct a 'lifelong coherence' in identity narratives to vindicate career choices. Their study showed a pattern in the way artists

¹⁵ This interview was conducted in 2007. A year later saw the start of a crisis in the international banking system, the collapse of several banks, rising unemployment and a threatened deep economic recession. Much of this was popularly laid at the door of the banking industry. This leaves me to speculate whether this 'pride in being a bank manager' is a discursive position Yvonne would be able to take up in quite the same way today. This points to how intimately the mobilisations of particular identities are embedded within bigger, but still provisional, orders.

constructed themselves as particularly preoccupied during childhood in creative pursuits, drawing and so on. This retrospective account, one which Taylor and Littleton note could easily be imagined of *most* children, was used to confirm the ‘logic’ of art being central in their now adult lives. Extract 40 here displays a similar connection of past and present. The lifelong desire Yvonne claims adds even more to her account of her employment as a story of particular success. Working up a lifelong narrative coherence in this way also makes a psychological biography; it constructs a seamless, unified, psychological self travelling through time, and illustrates empirically the ‘doing’ of unified selves across time.

At the same time, it is apparent that Olivia, who entered the banking field first, is not located anywhere in the account Yvonne gives of always having wanted this career, despite Olivia’s practical accomplishment of having started her career ahead of Yvonne. Yvonne’s claim to this lifelong wish takes ownership of her career choice to herself, and represses any notion that she was following in her sister’s footsteps. Adlerian scholars drawing on a psychoanalytic reading (see Sanders, 2004) might be tempted to call this a continuation of the younger sister’s unconscious dethronement of the older: removing the older sister from the account just as she removed her from her central position in the family as the first, and for a while, only child. But, drawing on discursive resources for interpreting this talk means that *if* it is the case that the older sister is being pushed aside, being dethroned, it is achieved discursively through the absence of any talk recognising Olivia’s prior occupation of this slot.

Up to this point in the interview Yvonne had occupied the ground and I had been responding to her success story. Olivia had intervened briefly to assist

Yvonne calculate her age when first appointed.

Extract 41.

[02:50/150:53]

- 1 Jean how old were you when you (.)
- 2 Yvonne er
- 3 Olivia well I was because you got yours just after me didn't you and I
- 4 was (.)
- 5 Jean so you're both bank managers
- 6 Olivia I'm not any more but I was
- 7 Jean oh right
- 8 Olivia erm
- 9 Yvonne about three years
- 10 Olivia yeah well I moved to when was I moved to (.) well I've been
- 11 well I've been in the CRU (.) two and a half years I did (.) just
- 12 over half a year (.) three (.) about four years ago (.) that I got
- 13 mine so it will be about three and a half years I bet
- 14 Yvonne yeah
- 15 Olivia when you got yours (.)
- 16 Yvonne but then the first year I did it I also got (.) managers' manager of
- 17 the year

These are Olivia's first words (line 3) approximately three minutes into the interview. Yvonne's hesitation about how old she had been when she was

appointed (line 2) is taken up by Olivia as an opening to join in the conversation. Olivia's comment 'you got yours just after me' (line 3) was the first indication in the interview that both sisters had been bank managers. My comment 'so you're both bank managers' (line 5) invites clarification. Olivia tells me she was, but has moved to something else. Before this conversation develops Olivia returns the topic to her younger sister, and passes the interactional ground back to her by addressing her directly: 'it will be about three and a half years ... when you got yours' (line 13-15). Yvonne resumes the ground and continues her story of success: 'the first year I did it I also got (.) managers' manager of the year' (lines 16-17). Yvonne has additional components to her story of success. Olivia again waits, making conversational space for her sister to continue. The extract goes on (hence the continuation in line numbers):

Extract 42.

[03:17/150:53]

- 16 Yvonne but then the first year I did it I also got (.) managers' manager of
17 the year
18 Jean wow
19 Yvonne now then what that is it's like (.) I think (.) is it hundred and
20 fifty managers (.) so out of a hundred and fifty managers (.) in
21 the region (.) I won that (.)
22 Jean and that was your first year?
23 Yvonne that was my first year of doing it yeah (.) I got my- which
24 basically means that staff (.) it was voted by by the managers in

- 25 your area and then (.) they sat round a table (.) erm (.) oh I was
26 going to say normal people y'know what I mean like erm (.)
27 normal staff
28 Jean yes
29 Yvonne and they (.) they described you (.) so they didn't use names or
30 [anything
31 Jean [oh I see
32 Yvonne they just described the person you were (.) and they chose (.)
33 me so out of a hundred and fifty managers (.) and I (.) y'know I
34 was very proud
35 Jean I'm sure

Yvonne is able to add greatly to her account of success with these extra resources. Not only is she doing a job she is proud of, not only was this said to be the fulfilment of a lifelong ambition, but also she is able to present herself as very good at it and warrant that presentation. In this account of her 'managers manager' award (lines 16-34), Yvonne's achievements have been recognised by staff and senior managers alike. Yet more, as Yvonne continues, this is also worked up as an achievement which has overcome obstacles.

Extract 43.

[04:03/150:53]

- 36 Yvonne I think I've (.) personally I feel I have to fight a lot harder (.)
37 I'm not (weasley) I've never slept my way to the top or

- 38 Jean mm
- 39 Yvonne y'know I've always felt ((*bell rings*)) as though (.) sorry that
- 40 was my mobile
- 41 Jean s'alright
- 42 Yvonne erm I've had to (.) fi::ght (.) harder (.) because of being big
- 43 Jean mm
- 44 Yvonne I think that's stepped in my way being (.) fat (.) I've always
- 45 been (.) big and (.) like I say you don't (.) get any favours

Yvonne constructs this obstacle to her success as her bodily size: 'I've had to (.) fi::ght (.) harder (.) because of being big... that's stepped in my way being (.) fat (.) I've always been (.) big and (.) like I say you don't (.) get any favours' (lines 42-45).

Drawing on this discursive resource of surmounting problems related to her size, Yvonne's achievements are made even greater. Yvonne presents herself as having fought for what she has achieved. Also, by claiming that she 'has never slept [her] way to the top' (line 37), and does not 'get any favours' (line 45), Yvonne is simultaneously claiming her successes as her own, earned on merit, and distancing herself from this potential accusation women face that they (we) do use sex to gain promotion; *and* reproducing that accusation by marking herself out as not having taken that route.

In summary then, Yvonne has been able to mobilise resources for a remarkable account of success. She has achieved a career position in which she takes immense pride, having wanted this all her life, has had her achievements

recognised by her peers and has achieved all this on merit, despite obstacles.

At this point I move to open up the conversation to Olivia, although Yvonne does not relinquish the floor easily and I am complicit in this.

Extract 44.

[07:31/150:53]

- 1 Jean ((to Olivia)) and had you always known that that's (.) what you
2 Olivia no
3 Jean ((to Yvonne)) 'cos y- (.) you said that didn't you that you'd
4 always
5 Yvonne I always wanted banking yeah
6 Olivia no (.) I never
7 Yvonne for wrong reasons (.) I always thought it was to do with maths
8 ((everybody laughs)) it is more of a manager now (you) have to
9 do things to do with maths but (.)
10 Olivia there's not much maths in it
11 Jean well I would have thought there was a lot of- (.) yeah
12 Yvonne no it's people skills
13 Jean yes I guess so
14 Yvonne in banking (.)
15 Olivia yeah
16 Yvonne in't it really (.)

17 Olivia and I (.) I didn't know what I wanted to do (.) I'd applied to go
18 to university and then at the last minute (.) decided (.) that I
19 didn't want to go to university (.) so:: (.) I just wrote off (.) to
20 different banks (.) because in those days banking was a good
21 job

My question bringing Olivia into the conversation 'and had you always known that that's (.) what you' (line 1) invited a direct comparison with Yvonne's comment earlier about always having wanted to be in banking (extract 40, page 296). In contrast, Olivia says 'no' (line 2); and then as I re-emphasise the comparison with Yvonne by saying 'cos y- (.) you said that didn't you' (line 3), Olivia confirms 'no (.) I never' (line 6). There is no ambivalence here. Olivia is marking herself out in clear contrast to her younger sister. But, this leaves an implicit gap to be filled – if Olivia did not want to go into banking, how did it come about? Olivia constructs quite a casual, opportunistic entry. She had choices, but was undecided: she could have gone to university but decided not to. Instead, she says 'I just wrote off (.) to different banks (.) because in those days banking was a good job' (lines 19-21). This comment 'in those days' works to justify Olivia's choice as rational, sensible.

This is a much more circumspect opening to Olivia's account of her career story - although I am interpreting my reading in the light of the whole interview, knowing with hindsight that Olivia is about to recount a narrative of troubled positions where she 'didn't hack it as a branch manager', to use her words (extract 38).

This sequence of talk, of not particularly wanting this career, functions very effectively to play down any suggestion of Olivia having a particular investment in the job. This matters because Olivia is about to recount a story of trouble. To position her entry into employment as something that was simply a last minute alternative to university, but not anything that deeply mattered, reduces the sting of the subsequent difficulties.

This contrast points to one of the crucial observations for this chapter. The contingency of having the two sisters together, where their stories are in immediate relation to each other, positions the two accounts in direct comparison, with each other. This comparison is not ‘inevitable’, but the point is, all three of us in this interview *do* it. It is an ethnomethodological practice in action. The components of this interview unfold interactionally, intersubjectively, relationally. Olivia has to follow her younger sister’s remarkable account of success, and it is with a story which is less easily configured as success. This is not just my reading. Both Olivia and later Yvonne orientate to it in such a way as to suggest the same interpretation.

Olivia begins her account of her career path with a report of a conflict; she had been ‘passed over’ for promotion.

Extract 45.

[09:41/150:53]

- 1 Olivia he’d obviously been ill advised by his (.) under manager (.) and
- 2 had gone for the bloke because this under manager was very
- 3 male [orientated

- 4 Jean [mm
5 Olivia and yet I was sat there going well I got that and I've got so and
6 so and by the end of it he was like (.) e:::r leave it with me and
7 within (.) four weeks I got my (.) y'know

Like her younger sister, Olivia is also able to work up an account of obstacles overcome. She had been passed over for promotion, had lodged an appeal, and was awarded her higher grade 'within (.) four weeks' (line 7). Olivia's comment, 'he'd obviously been ill advised' (line 1) is a beautifully finessed touch. It forestalls the potential query that perhaps this appointing manager had been right not to promote Olivia; Olivia provides an explicit alternative to explain his decision, one which preserves her 'competence'. Both sisters have a successful identity available to them here in the 'overcoming' accounts they work up. However, Olivia then indicates the promotion brought trouble:

Extract 46.

[11:36/150:53]

- 1 Olivia so (.) but I got it (.) I mean I've I've gone through (.) but as
2 soon as I became a branch manager I knew I didn't want to be
3 one
4 Jean oh really (.) what was it [about it
5 Olivia [I hated it (.) I hate every minute of it
6 (.) because people are not like me ((*laughter*)) (.) that that is the
7 be all and end all of it (.) because I have always (.) I've gone to

- 8 work (.) I've done my work (.) I've taken pride in my job (.) and
9 as far as possible have kept my private life (.) away from work
10 (.) which sometimes it does come in (.) y'know but (.) but as far
11 as possible I I've kept it away
- 12 Jean [mm
- 13 Olivia [y'know work's work (.) work w- is an escape from whatever's
14 happening (.) in your private life works the (.) works the (.) the
15 escape (.) but as a manager (.) it's not the manager's job (.) if I
16 could have gotten on (.) got on and done my manager's job (.)
17 I'd have been quite happy (.) but it's the little things li:ke (.)
18 y'know (.) hh (.) I think I've been unlucky with the branches I
19 got because I got branches with very big (.) staffing issues (.)
20 unfortunately (.) if they'd have put me in a nice little branch (.)
21 where everything was running smoothly

Olivia's comment 'as soon as I became a branch manager I knew I didn't want to be one' (lines 1-3) is an intricate manoeuvre signalling some trouble. I demonstrated in chapter 6 the way in which a discourse of wanting not to be doing something is available both as a warrant for terminating it, and as a resource for configuring a potential failure as a successful act of agency and choice. Potentially at least it might have worked in the same way here. But, rather than pursue such a discourse of choice, Olivia continued to orientate to her appointment as trouble by pointing to her construction of what went wrong. Her reason for 'hating' her appointment, Olivia says, was 'because people are not like

me' (line 6). There could be some irony here, and the comment appears humorous and is followed by laughter from all of us. However, the humour softens a position Olivia nevertheless maintains. Unlike these other people who fail to do their work, fail to take pride in their jobs and fail to keep their private life away from work, Olivia positions herself as a reliable and efficient worker. The shortcomings lie elsewhere, in this construction: Olivia elaborates with details of her first appointment.

Extract 47.

[13:46/150:53]

- 1 Olivia I've got a girl who's (.) from Canada (.) who's been off long
- 2 term sick and now decided just to bugger off back to Canada (.)
- 3 no sick note no resignation nothing (.) I've got a lad who's an
- 4 alcoholic (.) got (.) attendance problems (.) etcetera etcetera (.)
- 5 I've got an Asian girl who they took on (.) who didn't pass
- 6 probation (.) but because they were short staffed they kept her
- 7 on anyway

This is just a selection from a list of what Olivia is constructing as staff failings she had to try to overcome. What I want to draw attention to however is what happens in response to this. This is an illustration of the usefulness of this methodological pairing of participants who share knowledge. In this next extract, line 1 below, I start to empathise. I say 'that sounds like a huge challenge for a first appointment'. Indeed, reflecting on my interview style across the corpus, I

rarely directly challenge speakers on their interpretations, and never on the ‘factuality’ of their biographical accounts. This story was being ‘accepted’ by me and I am a collaborator here in co-constructing it as a reasonable account. In contrast, Yvonne is ready to challenge Olivia’s interpretation of what went wrong.

Extract 48.

[14:40/150:53]

- | | | |
|----|--------|---|
| 1 | Jean | that sounds like a huge challenge for a first [appointment |
| 2 | Olivia | [yes (.) and now |
| 3 | | I'm not the person who's going to say (.) oh come here lets give |
| 4 | | you a hug |
| 5 | Yvonne | that's it |
| 6 | Olivia | I'm not a huggy person |
| 7 | Yvonne | not being |
| 8 | Olivia | I'm sorry (.) [I can't do it |
| 9 | Yvonne | [I don't think- what she's just described is |
| 10 | | probably most branches [I'm not saying (unclear) |
| 11 | Olivia | [it is and I can't do it |
| 12 | Yvonne | but we are (.) to say we're sisters we are completely [different |
| 13 | Olivia | [I'm sorry |
| 14 | | (.) can't do it (.) can't deal with it (.) |
| 15 | Yvonne | [it's not just looks (.) |
| 16 | Olivia | [come to work do your job |
| 17 | Yvonne | yeah (.) attitude (.) now (.) I'm the sort of manager which would |

18 have took all that on (.) and (.) and I am the huggy feely type (.)
19 that's how I succeed by getting [all (.) all my staff
20 Olivia [I mean I will huggy feel to a
21 certain extent (.) but then I lose patience
22 Yvonne (unclear)
23 Olivia no no I'll huggy feel to a certain extent but when it comes down
24 to it (.) I'm only going to help you so way (.) so far you help
25 yourself (.)

There is a slightly chaotic feel to the transcript here as both sisters address me as the interviewer simultaneously. Yvonne starts to challenge Olivia's reading of events here by comparing her own approach to staff management with her older sister's. When Olivia says 'I'm not the person who's going to say (.) oh come here lets give you a hug' (lines 3-4); Yvonne says 'that's it' (line 5) and 'not being' (line 7) – which I hear as the start of an uncompleted 'not being funny' – a phrase Yvonne appears to start but leaves incomplete on several occasions. This prefaces a disagreement. Yvonne says 'I don't think-' (line 9) but breaks off at 'think-'. She continues. The branch Olivia has described as particularly difficult, with an unreasonable number of issues and expectations, is now constructed by Yvonne as quite typical: 'what she's just described is probably most branches' (lines 9-10); and Olivia agrees; 'it is and I can't do it' (line 11). Yvonne has removed Olivia's rationale for the difficulties, and Olivia has agreed.

There is some tremendously difficult positioning work taking place here, with big implications for identity. Gergen (1994) has argued persuasively that

taking up a narrative position successfully is relationally dependent on that position being recognised and accepted by others. I appeared willing to accept and collaborate in constructing Olivia's report of extraordinary demands being placed on her in her first post. Indeed, one can imagine the way this story may have continued had Yvonne not been present. If Olivia and I had been on our own Olivia might have been free to say something like, 'I was manager of a couple of branches before moving to my current post at head office'. That would have had the appearance of a conventional upwards trajectory, a straightforward recognisable story of career success. However, with her sister present, it is difficult for Olivia to present it this way because her accounts are subject to challenge from someone with their own claims to knowledge, and someone *willing* to make that challenge. The semiotic histories the sisters share are carried into this narrative moment. Olivia offers an explanation that she was unable to make a good transition to her new post as bank manager, because of other people; but this explanation is challenged by Yvonne as an ordinary demand of 'most branches' (line 10). Yvonne has refused the primary factor Olivia had offered to account for the difficulties in her first managerial appointment, and positioned Olivia into accepting responsibility herself: 'it is and I can't do it' (line 11). However, this is not a complete acquiescence. Olivia accepts that she may have a part to play in this but continues to construct her staff as significantly at fault: 'I'm only going to help you so way (.) so far you help yourself' (lines 24-25).

I am reading Olivia's position as a difficult one. As the older sister she was the first to leave school and choose a career. She chose banking and began to make progress. Four years later her younger sister left school and chose the same

career. She too began to make progress. Both sisters speak of having to fight for their promotions to management, but both attained them. The older sister, with a four year head start achieved a promotion to management first, but immediately struggled, she says. The younger sister achieved her promotion soon after, and in her first year won a major award for her performance. Olivia then is the older sister who went into the job before her younger sister, and has had a troubled passage through; whereas her younger sister has followed in her footsteps, and achieved a quicker, smoother, and more successful passage through.

The narrative resources Olivia has, told in proximity to Yvonne's story, *and* Yvonne, means Olivia has to work hard to be seen as an successful achieving woman. This is how I understand extract 38 from Olivia: 'divorced (.) didn't hack it as a branch manager (.) still living at home with parents' (lines 2-3). Olivia is not recounting a story of failure when she says this. Instead, she is working hard to construct, inhabit, and have accepted a position of 'success', of sometimes extreme adversity overcome, bringing her 'to a place where I'm (.) happy with myself (.) strong again (lines 6-7). This repertoire of adversity making one strong is the same as that used by Nora when she was describing her marriage and subsequent divorce in chapter 6. It allows a re-fashioning of failure; but its receipt cannot be controlled. Indeed Olivia herself invokes alternative readings, and therefore acceptance and recognition of her account of success is precarious even in its beginning. I want to think more now about this notion of 'recognition' as it runs through the sisters' talk.

8.5. Interpersonal orders: occupying positions and struggles for recognition

My interview set the sisters a task of offering up accounts of their subject-selves. Discourse studies have been very effective in pointing to the way in which part of the accounting task requires offering up a narrative which will be ‘recognised’ – received – as a particular kind of account. The previous chapters have drawn on this legacy of resources to look at some of the intricate work speakers take on when they negotiate trouble and dilemma around, for example, what constitutes passing subjects, legitimising choice and so on, as they work with concepts of success and failure. This notion of the ease or difficulty in terms of working up a passing career has been prevalent throughout this chapter and I finished the previous section exploring the way in which Olivia, the older sister, had much more difficult territory to navigate in presenting a story which would be recognised as its own form of success: Olivia presented the counter argument herself.

What I want to suggest now is that this notion of ‘recognition’ – and misrecognition – forms part of the *habitual* way in which the sisters make sense of themselves in relation to each other and their families. It works implicitly, through the way accounts are received, and explicitly through the rhetorical and dialogical negotiations on show. I am using ‘recognition’ in three ways. One is the negotiations (troubled or untroubled) which go into the receipt of talk as particular kind of talk, with particular kind of meaning, such as Olivia’s account of her (troubled) successes and the rejection by her sister of Olivia’s first attempt at mitigation. The second is an explicit deployment of talk of recognitions which

I will demonstrate shortly. The third, related to the first, is one of the means of achieving recognitions – the taking up and inhabiting of available subject positions, recognisable discursive slots mobilised in other versions at other times, and flexibly available for the new interactional moment. This is not a new argument of course; it is central to the combined Foucauldian and ethnomethodological argument Wetherell (1998; 2003) makes in her extension of the notion of positions and positioning worked up by Davies, Harré, van Langenhove and others (Davies and Harré, 1990; Harré and Moghaddam, 2003; Harré and van Langenhove, 1999). There are slots available as resources to draw on, to inhabit, in order to complete interactional business. However, what I am pointing to is that there is an interpersonal logic, an interpersonal order in the way this happens. The taking up/taking over of a previously worked up slot, is a habitual, routine, pattern of interpersonal engagement enacted by the sisters both here in the interview and, I am speculating, beyond the interview. Taking up, taking over, each other's subject positions is a habitual interpersonal order the sisters share in their *family* discourse. It so happens, that one of the components of the narratives that sisters take up, is an account of recognitions.

This next extract signals patterns which repeat many times. At this point in the interview Olivia has been saying she has been misunderstood by the people around her. (She has just been talking about her A levels at school and I will be coming back to this later.)

Extract 49.

[91:47/150:53]

- 1 Olivia there's other things I mean (.) er like with my granddad I mean I
2 was (.) I was my granddad's apple of my granddad's eye (.) you
3 see there ((Yvonne is rolling her eyes)) (.) instantly (.) huh (.) I
4 was the apple of my granddad's eye
- 5 Yvonne no (.) but I
- 6 Olivia (unclear)
- 7 Yvonne no
- 8 Olivia I couldn't help being the ha- apple of my granddad's eye (.) and
9 I as a child (.) but this is something that other people don't
10 understand (.) as a child I tried damned hard not to be apple of
11 his eye (.) so (.) I wouldn't go and visit (.) now I now get
12 blamed by members of the family well you never used to go and
13 see granddad I used to go and see him all the time or you never
14 went to see your granddad (.) but as a child what I was trying to
15 do (.) was stop being the apple of his eye and let other people
16 get in there (.) but it didn't work but (.) as a child what can you
17 do you don't understand how to change things
- 18 Jean mm
- 19 Olivia but I get blamed for that now
- 20 Jean mm
- 21 Olivia but I couldn't help it (.) what could I do
- 22 Jean mm
- 23 Yvonne nobody ever blames you (.) not as I was never blaming you I

- 24 blame (.) I don't know if I'd say I blamed what I (hhh) what I
25 found hard was (.) he erm (.) he'd always favour her
26 Olivia he did
27 Yvonne I used to visit (.) she says I used to visit (.) and what when I say
28 favour y'know (.) he'd answer phone is that you Olivia (.) no (.)
29 is it you Glenda no it's your other granddaughter you know this
30 [is it I always came out with (.)
31 Jean [mm
32 Yvonne and then I'd visit and you'd walk (.) he'd open door how's
33 Olivia (.) now when I got older I used to answer back it'd be
34 like (.) I'm fine thanks granddad she's at home (.) and it were
35 like (.) and I'm not being rude but he was like (.) she's not
36 coming to visit you I'm visiting
37 Olivia I wasn't going to visit because I (.) I was trying to stop that but
38 of course as a nine little whatever year old I was
39 Yvonne yeah
40 Olivia it doesn't work like that

This is a complex story. Olivia presents it as a story of stepping aside, and of misunderstood actions. She was, she says, particularly favoured by her grandfather, 'I was my granddad's apple of my granddad's eye' (line 2). The roll of the eyes by Yvonne, and 'you see there (.) instantly' (lines 2-3) from Olivia, speaks to this being a (still) contentious story; and indeed the you of 'you see' suggests I am being called on here to witness this contention.

Olivia's story is that she had stepped aside to make space for a younger sister that she claims even as a young child she could see was struggling to find favour with her grandfather: 'as a child I tried damned hard not to be apple of his eye' (lines 10-11), 'but as a child what I was trying to do (.) was stop being the apple of his eye and let other people get in there' (lines 14-16).

Olivia says her actions were misunderstood and she has been held at fault by her family for not visiting the grandfather. Yvonne starts to disagree, 'nobody ever blames you' (line 23), but then stops. Yvonne explains her older sister was indeed the favoured one: 'he'd answer phone is that you Olivia ... no it's your other granddaughter (lines 28-29), and 'I'd visit and you'd walk (.) he'd open door how's Olivia' (lines 32-33). In this account of these early years with their grandfather Olivia was the one presented as occupying the attentional space with the grandfather, despite her physical absence. Both sisters construct this event in the same way. Olivia was in this relationship with the grandfather first, and Yvonne the younger sister was fighting for space which her older sister occupied even when she was absent. Just a short moment later in this section of the interview both sisters speak explicitly about Yvonne not being recognised:

Extract 50.

[94:28/150:53]

- 1 Yvonne I was never (.) the favourite (.) which didn't bother (.) it wasn't
- 2 being the favourite it was just being (.) recognised maybe

And again shortly after:

Extract 51.

[95:09/150:53]

- 1 Yvonne it it's back to being unjust like I say I don't blame (.) you as
2 such (.) y'know it's my granddad I blame but I thought (.) I felt
3 like (.) what do I need to do
4 Jean mm
5 Yvonne I visit you (.) I visit you (.) every other night if not ev- y'know
6 (.) one bit (.) it were every night (.) y'know I were coming
7 home from work and going straight off to see him
8 Jean mm
9 Yvonne to put pressure off my mum (.) and (.)
10 Olivia yeah for me it's other way around because what'd I had to do to
11 stop him being like he was (.) it didn't matter what I did
12 Jean mm
13 Olivia he wouldn't (.) recognise anybody else

We do not know if this is how things 'actually' happened; but we know it is how the two women co-construct it here. Olivia and Yvonne share a semiotic order that Yvonne has grown up struggling to follow her sister; to occupy some of the space taken up by her sister, and to be recognised herself. What is also evident though, is that *both* sisters claim a misrecognition. Both construct struggles to make themselves visible: Yvonne, in her relationship with her grandfather; and Olivia, for her unrecognised attempt to fix this. Yvonne was the granddaughter who was there 'every night' (extract 51 line 6), she would telephone her

grandfather (extract 49 line 28), visit him (extract 49 line 32), try to take the ‘pressure off’ her mother when her grandfather was ill, and all the time not being recognised by the recipient of all this care. Olivia however, was also telling a story of being unrecognised in her efforts to make space for her sister. But, what is interesting, is this (mis)recognition recurs in various forms throughout the interview.

What I am developing here is an illustration of an account both sisters share of a younger sibling struggling to live up to the image of her older sister. The older sister is constructed as effortlessly successful as a youngster; at least in her relationships with her grandfather. The younger sister was constantly working out how to inhabit some of that space. I am speculating that these early identity practices have sedimented into habitual practices for what comes later as the younger sister routinely works to step into the space her sister has occupied.

This is reflected succinctly in this next pair of exchanges where both sisters recount their hard work completing their A levels. What is remarkable here is how two apparently different stories, stories which attend to working up difference between the sisters, end up in almost exactly the same place, with the younger sister taking up the precise narrative capital her older sister has been utilising and making it her own for this interactional moment.

Extract 52.

[87:01/150:53]

- 1 Yvonne growing up (.) things that I will never ever forget (.) my dad
- 2 saying to me (.) the way you carry on it might be you that goes

- 3 to university if you want (.) and I remember thinking (.) oh so
4 weren't (.) I ever considered for university
5 Jean yeah
6 Yvonne you see we're very different in the fact that (.) Olivia (.) can (.)
7 scrape (.)
8 Olivia I don't have to [(unclear)
9 Yvonne [she don't have to work but she can scrape
10 [through and get
11 Olivia [no no now I would say (.) up until A Levels (.) I worked damn
12 hard for my A Levels (.) now the problem is because I didn't
13 work hard for anything else (.) because I didn't have to
14 Jean mm
15 Olivia everybody nobody believes me when I say that (.) I worked
16 damned hard for those A Levels

Again, both sisters share the understanding that schoolwork, at least at a younger age, came easier for the older sister. Indeed, this is perhaps a family logic on show; that Yvonne was not expected to achieve as much as her older sister Olivia. Yvonne reports a comment by her father suggesting that *she* might go to university, as if that were contrary to expectations. Both sisters knit together this identity of different academic skills in a kind of duet, 'I don't have to' (line 8), says Olivia, 'she don't have to work' (line 9) says Yvonne. This gives a strong sense that either sister, in the absence of the other, would tell this story of school work in much the same kind of way: Olivia passed her earlier exams without

having to work hard, whereas Yvonne was less gifted and did have to work. This constructed difference is an organising framework the sisters share. But, it becomes complicated by Olivia asking for recognition for having worked hard after all. 'I would say (.) up until A Levels (.) I worked damn hard for my A Levels (.) now the problem is because I didn't work hard for anything else (.) because I didn't have to' – Olivia is continuing the family myth here – 'everybody nobody believes me when I say that (.) I worked damned hard for those A Levels' (lines 11-16). Again the price is misrecognition in that others, Olivia says, will not affirm that account.

So far, the story of the sisters has been one of difference; this is the sisters' story throughout – how different they are. But, as an analyst, a different pattern begins to emerge – a pattern of similarities and recognitions. In this next extract we are told that Yvonne also achieved good 'A' levels, just like her sister. Again, Yvonne's premise is that she is quite unlike her sister. She may have achieved a career position that matches her sister; but this was against expectation:

Extract 53.

[97:06/150:53]

- | | | |
|---|--------|---|
| 1 | Yvonne | and like (.) I've always been made to I mean I am (.) again |
| 2 | | proud of myself in the fact I am a bank manager (.) yeah I |
| 3 | | y'know it's a known thing in my family I haven't got any |
| 4 | | common sense (.) I am a bank manager ((<i>laughter</i>)) no but I'm |
| 5 | | a bank manager because I had learnt very hard on |
| 6 | Jean | oh I see |

- 7 Yvonne what my job is and learnt (.) y'know
- 8 Jean yeah
- 9 Yvonne that's how I've done it (.) like (.) you say about (.) learning
10 thing I I can't learn things and it sticks I have to (.) y'know ten
11 minutes later I've forgotten what I've read I have to really (.)
12 concentrate (.) so like I'm proud of the fact that (.) yeah I get I
13 get the feeling growing up (.) that my mum and dad didn't ever
14 think (.) when I say don't think that I'd amount to much I don't
15 mean they put me down or (.) were nasty to me or (.) but it were
16 comments like that oh you might get to uni I thought oh so you
17 were obviously [didn't think I were clever enough or
- 18 Jean [mm
- 19 Olivia you had a poor start though didn't you because you you didn't
20 start reading till you were
- 21 Yvonne my mum
- 22 Olivia god knows what age
- 23 Yvonne has this (.) thing where she gets an idea in her head and you
24 cannot move it [ever
- 25 Olivia [oh god (.) it's like concrete
- 26 Yvonne I could be a s- I mean I worked damn hard at school and I
27 weren't a straight A student but I got
- 28 Jean mm
- 29 Yvonne good grades but I had to work hard at them I mean my best

30 mate always jokes with everyone that I were a swat

Again, everyone invoked here is constructed as agreeing that Yvonne is less academically able. 'I can't learn things and it sticks ... I have to really (.) concentrate' (lines 10-12); 'I got the feeling growing up (.) that my mum and dad didn't ever think ... I'd amount to much' (lines 12-14). Olivia adds Yvonne was a late reader, she 'had a poor start' (line 19). The reference to their mother is explained later in the interview when Yvonne describes her mother requesting extra help from Yvonne's school for her reading. What happens here though is very interesting. Whilst still maintaining their academic differences, Yvonne is now quietly, explicitly, taking up the *precise* narrative her sister has just been inhabiting in extract 52. There, and repeated several times elsewhere, Olivia had said 'I worked damn hard for my A levels' (extract 52, lines 11-12), and 'I worked damned hard for those A levels (extract 52, lines 15-16). In this extract, 53, there is now a remarkable mirroring of Olivia's words when Yvonne also says 'I mean I worked damn hard' (line 26), and 'I got ... good grades but I had to work hard' (lines 27-29). Yvonne is able to take up, with ease, the precise narrative claim her sister had just worked up moments earlier.

It is increasingly apparent that not only does their 'order' of things appear to be that Yvonne does much that Olivia has done; it is an order which appears to leave Olivia more and more on difficult ground, with fewer subject positions to inhabit as her own. In the account the sisters construct for me in this interview, Olivia, according to the habitual family logic, is the academically gifted sister: she achieved good A levels. But so did her supposedly less gifted sister. This

position of distinction is now a troubled one for Olivia to maintain, although both sisters continue to construct it so; just as they co-construct the younger sister's special efforts to keep up. At the same time, the younger sister is also able to recruit her own account of success.

I want to show another even more startling example now; one that illustrates Yvonne does not just step into the positive positions her older sister has worked up; both sisters take up each other's troubled positions too as the sisters introduce, and later compete in, narratives of depression and suicide.

Yvonne introduced the notion of depression first as she responded to the photograph in Figure 17.

Extract 54.

[75:28/150:53]

1 Yvonne I don't think there's
2 anything more proud
3 than (.) have you got
4 children

5 Jean no

6 Yvonne having a child (.)
7 children having (.) it

8 don't get me wrong its scary because you suddenly have this
9 baby and think oh my god

10 Jean mm

11 Yvonne I'm re- responsible (.) you see you talk about success and

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Figure 17. Mother and baby.

Photo: Express/Getty Images. Plate 18 in
Appendix E(1).

- 12 failure (.) in the past I've suffered from depression (.) when
13 before I had children
- 14 Jean mm
- 15 Yvonne then since (.) having mine (.) I've gone through what they call
16 baby blues (.) now (.) you go through the (.) I'm not good
17 enough (.) I'm not good enough [for my children
- 18 Jean [what as a mum
- 19 Yvonne yeah (.) that they'd be better without me (.) sometimes (.) and
20 then other times I think well no because (.) I don't think-
21 y'know (.) my baby's face lights up when she sees me (.) she'll
22 do it with others but I can make her laugh within a second
- 23 Jean yeah
- 24 Yvonne because she recognises her mum (.)

The discourse of the centrality of children for constructions of success amongst the mothers in this sample is invoked again here. Yvonne ties her sense of herself as a mother explicitly to questions of success and failure. It is also worth pausing for a moment to note that Yvonne has another story of success to take up here. Earlier in the interview Yvonne had told me her first child was born following IVF treatment; but the next had followed by surprise, without medical intervention, and despite a continuing medical condition understood to make conception very difficult: 'I shouldn't get pregnant' she had told me. It was not said in the interview, but one can imagine an earlier indexical logic in the family that if either sister was to have children it would have been more likely to be the

older sister. However, at this point in their lives, the older sister has not had children, and the younger sister now has three. Against the odds, Yvonne has also successfully taken over this position of being the daughter to secure the next generation of her family.

For this section, though, I most want to point to Yvonne's mobilisation of a discourse of depression and baby blues: 'in the past I've suffered from depression (.) when before I had children ... then since (.) having mine (.) I've gone through what they call baby blues' (lines 13-16). Yvonne was the first to mention depression, but not much was made of it as the conversation moved elsewhere.

In this next extract which comes some 50 minutes later Olivia is also directly addressing the interview task of taking up identities of success and failure. Yvonne has been positioning herself very successfully throughout, particularly in her career, her marriage of 14 years, and her children. Olivia is now attempting to summarise her own position which is ambiguous and troubled in relation to Yvonne's resolute claiming of success. This extract includes the segment I first quoted in extract 38.

Extract 55.

[125:32/150:53]

- 1 Olivia I mean (.) a lot of people would look at me and probably say I
- 2 wasn't a success because (.) divorced (.) didn't hack it as a
- 3 branch manager (.) still living at home with parents (.) but from
- 4 my point of view (.) came out of an abusive marriage (.) severe

- 5 clinical depression where I tried to commit suicide (.) luckily I
6 didn't (.) to a place where I'm (.) happy with myself (.) strong
7 again
- 8 Jean mm
- 9 Olivia alright I suppose that the down side to all of it is that I'm still
10 and I've got to learn to get over this (.) I'm still quite (.) I've got
11 to this place I'm strong and comfortable and I'm not going past
12 that boundary
- 13 Jean mm
- 14 Olivia and that's probably just my
- 15 Yvonne do you think part (.)
- 16 Olivia my my [problem
- 17 Yvonne [part of your (.) not problem sorry (.) I see you Olivia
18 and it it freaks me out (.) and I'm not saying that I should know
19 about this (.) but I would question if (.) saying that you won't
20 you can't talk to my mum (.) I know you can't talk to my mum
21 (.) you seem so completely different (.) if I've got problems (.) I
22 will talk to my mates or I will talk to someone
- 23 Olivia but that's part of my problem why a lot of my family I've just
24 said something that you didn't know haven't I
- 25 Yvonne yeah you said you [think
- 26 Olivia [yeah (.) yeah
- 27 Yvonne it doesn't (.) I'll be honest with you it doesn't surprise me

Olivia's disclosure in line 5, 'I tried to commit suicide' was a surprise, something I was ill prepared for and it seems, something that had not been discussed before between the sisters: Yvonne says 'I'm not saying that I should know about this' (lines 18-19) and Olivia, 'I've just said something that you didn't know haven't I' (lines 23-24).

This talk of experiencing attempted suicide was, I think, a difficult area of knowledge for Olivia to claim given that it appears not to have been discussed amongst the sisters before this point – or at least, this is their orientation. Nevertheless, it was one which she did claim and tried to refashion as a way of reading success where others might read failure: 'I tried to commit suicide (.) luckily I didn't (.) to a place where I'm (.) happy with myself (.) strong again ... alright I suppose that the down side to all of it is that I'm still and I've got to learn to get over this (.) I'm still quite (.) I've got to this place I'm strong and comfortable and I'm not going past that boundary' (lines 5-12).

I do not want to dwell on the hesitations and repairs here which seem to suggest this is still a troubled position for Olivia to work up. Instead, I am focusing on the conversation the sisters develop from this point. I have been making an argument that the interpersonal habits of engagement between these two sisters are that they take up each others subject positions and discursive capitals. In this instance, the younger sister had potentially opened the topic some 50 minutes earlier in her brief reference to depression and 'baby blues'. Now, in extract 56 Olivia takes this further when she speaks of 'clinical depression where I tried to commit suicide' (line 5). It is not my reading that Olivia's contribution here is a direct reference back to that earlier comment by Yvonne almost an hour

earlier, although of course it could be. Either way, the two narratives of depression and suicidal feelings are about to be placed in direct competition.

At this point both sisters were addressing me simultaneously. Olivia was telling me that she traces her depression back to her grandfather's disappointment in her for not being a boy. This is remarkable given that the accounts constructed above by both sisters emphatically present Olivia as the favoured one and yet now Olivia is claiming a troubled relationship with her grandfather: this *had been* Yvonne's position. While Olivia was telling me this, Yvonne was simultaneously talking to me about conversations with her midwife about identifying symptoms of post-natal depression. This extract starts with both women appearing to compete for 'expertise' on depression. Yvonne then moves on to also claim her own suicidal impulse.

Extract 56.

[133:54/150:53]

- 1 Olivia if you've got severe depression you don't know you've got
- 2 severe depression (.) you you think it's normal
- 3 Yvonne unless you feel [(unclear)
- 4 Olivia [until you've learnt what [(unclear)
- 5 Yvonne [because yeah
- 6 ((unclear overlapping speech))
- 7 Olivia but at the moment I know I'm fine
- 8 Yvonne there's certain well I was made to (.) what had happened was
- 9 I'd met (.) my granddad had died in the April I met my husband

10 in the October (.) we were engaged within six weeks three of
11 them I were out of country (.) and we were married in the
12 February so it all happened all quickly and I remember (.)
13 Olivia which freaked my [mother out
14 Yvonne [thinking (.) early hours of the morning (.) at
15 the co- at the computer in our old house (.) thinking (.) I want to
16 die (.) I want to commit suicide I've had enough (.) I I just had
17 it (.) and the only thing that stopped me wasn't my husband or
18 anything it was my mum because I thought (.) my mum (.)
19 would be devastated that her child had committed suicide

As one sister works up an account of extreme trouble and suicidal feelings, so too the other. This segment of the interview continued for some minutes with both sisters competing to have their version of depression 'recognised'. There is insufficient space to report more about the nature of the competition here but the argument I am making is, I think, now adequately empirically grounded. At so many points in this interview the sisters take up and take over the subject positions and narrative capitals each has available. This is the organising framework of the discursive recruitments they call on to make sense of themselves in relation to my questions and, importantly, in relation to each other – something which I speculate extends beyond the boundaries of my interview.

8.6. Chapter Summary and Conclusions

The central conceit of this chapter is the notion of a repeating interpersonal order where the younger sister regularly takes up the subject positions previously occupied by the older sister. The proposition is that this is a habit settled over time and practice. This happens within a weave of institutional and cultural practices encouraging such a taking over. Many contemporary technologies encourage, and indeed set up, the taking over the slots occupied by previous subjects. For example, caring for the needs of a new baby in the family supplants the older child's position as the youngest member; younger siblings in school follow older ones through the different grades and assessment processes. Age sets up expectations of who might be the next to leave school, get work, marry perhaps; and have children of one's own and so on. These are cultural practices which are so familiar as to have a taken for granted quality.

The practices of life mean there is a constant take up of slots that are new to the individual subject, but have previously been occupied by others. My analysis is taking this speculation further to show empirically a pattern of interpersonal practice taking place within this research interview whereby the younger sister takes up and takes over the subject positions and narrative capitals occupied by her elder sister.

This interpretation began 'biographically', as an account of two sisters embarking on similar career trajectories. This was a story of a younger sister not just following in an older sister's footsteps, but outpacing her, and outperforming her, moving into and exceeding the subject position of success formally occupied by her older sister.

My analysis moved on to suggest this appears to be a practice which repeats again and again in the interview; it appears to have been taken up as a habitual interpersonal order through which the sisters organise their relations, their narratives, what they do discursively in the interview, and what they report themselves doing. But, analysis also indicates that both sisters organise meanings around struggles for recognition, and two examples given here were recognition for their actions in their relationship with their grandfather and their hard work academically.

I have suggested that there is no requirement to understand this as a process of unconscious and hidden systematic desires. The intensity and emotional charge on show throughout this interview is achieved discursively; the relationality here is a dialogic practice. Projections onto the second sister (or other family members), identifications as certain sorts of persons, are not made in hidden processes; but are on display in the moment to moment deployment of each other's narrative capitals and subject positions.

Chapter 9. Conclusions

This thesis set out to explore contemporary constructions of success and failure for women in mid-life in Britain in the first decade of the 21st century, and to provide some empirical analysis of the monolithic sociological narratives of neoliberalism and individualisation as these get taken up in discursive practices. Further, it set out to make a contribution to current psychosocial debates and in particular the dialogue between a discursive psychosocial psychology and a psychoanalytic psychosocial psychology, both in terms of the nature of the person and appropriate methods for accessing that knowledge.

My analytic assumption throughout has been that language is social action constituting worlds. My interests have been in implications for understanding the formations of subjects, subjectivity and identity; in the psychologisation and individualisation of subjects; and with an analytic attention on a synthesis of fine-grained orders in interaction along with broader cultural and ideological orders of meaning making.

In 9.1. I summarise the contributions to literature, beginning with a summary of my analyses; then reviewing my demonstration of a multilayered analytic focus. I consider my contribution to understanding how the grand narratives of neoliberalism and individualisation are taken up in mundane discursive practices and I discuss my contribution to current debates between discursive and psychoanalytic psychosocial psychologies. In 9.2. I reflect on the research and consider future directions, finishing in 9.3. with some closing remarks.

9.1. Summarising the contributions

The empirical work in the thesis makes a substantive contribution to literature on women in mid-life and constructions of success and failure and the implications for the formation of subjects and identities. It illustrates the richness and depth of the discursive environment for this group, with a focus on the lived out ideological dilemmas as speakers work up different concerns around the concepts of successful and failing subjects, both in terms of their selves, and others.

My analysis throughout chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 has shown what a rich resource these interviews, in combination with the use of photographs, have been here for exploring consequential discursive action around taking up positions of success and failure, the identity work taking place, and some of the implications for subjects and subjectivity. They have generated rich access to the meaning making resources the women in this sample have for making sense of themselves and other women as certain sorts of subjects. I have argued that success and failure are not simple binaries where success is orientated to as uncomplicatedly good and failure uncomplicatedly troubled. Instead, success and failure are worked rhetorically in a range of shifting ways according to moment to moment interactional business.

In chapter 5, despite suggestions that discourses of ‘family’ may be less important in contemporary climates of individualisation, the talk in this study shows that family, enduring relationships, and managing a balance between paid work and family are centrally prioritised in the way women in this study work up passing identities. This is mediated though by dilemmas of the adequacy and sufficiency of subject positions of ‘housewife’ and ‘mother’ as constituents of

identities and whether they may be accepted as forms of success or be understood as deficient. These dilemmas were temporarily resolved through recruiting alternative intersecting identities. Privileging ‘family’ as a priority was orientated to as ‘sufficient’ *when* it was accompanied by alternative co-existing positions. In the process, this reproduced notions that some subject positions, on their own, are deficient and inadequate.

In chapter 6 I turned to the making of particular kinds of psychologised subjects: ones taking up discursive performances of modesty, agency, and emotional capitals. As speakers constructed themselves as (usually) successful and (rarely) failing subjects, they were frequently constructing themselves as living out particular kinds of individualised, psychologised selves, rich in the right emotional capitals and moral, relational, agentic, competences. Despite current cultural imperatives to be a materially successful self, managing claims of success and failure incorporated not only making particular kinds of claims, especially to sufficiency, but making them in the right kinds of way, in moderation and with modesty. The alternative was to risk a charge of psychological deficit in needing material possessions. Talk of ‘happiness’ was shown to be discursive capital which can be employed to outrank other forms of success. Moreover, contemporary success as it is constructed here appears to require claims to happiness as a crucial kind of psychological accomplishment for the successful subject.

Choice was also marked out as a particular element of the successful or failing self, and of the individualisation of the self. Simultaneously participants marked out ‘choice’ as one of the distinguishing characteristics separating their

own and previous generations of women. Yet, at the same time, participants construct an 'I' who is both *compelled* to make choice; and judged according to the quality of choices made. In the process, successful identities are also configured as responsible, moral, identities.

In chapter 7 the thesis moved focus to constructions of others as successful or failing subjects and explored in particular the way speakers generated imaginary versions of others. I presented this as the mobilisation of socially shared cultural resources where 'imagining' is embedded in the resources for making sense of the world. But, I also argued the discursive imaginings recruited by participants could be shown to be rooted in personal concerns. In doing so, I suggested that this contributes to theorising the 'subject' as one variably constituted in moment-to-moment discursive interactions, whilst simultaneously allowing the discourse analyst to take life history and continuities seriously. In addition, I argued that the notions of fantasy and projection are not dependent on psychoanalytic readings of the subject, but operate as discursive practices in that when people make sense of their worlds they project onto objects and events historically situated and habituated concerns.

In my final empirical chapter I extended the notion of situated personal order to situated interpersonal orders; the habits of discursive engagements that sediment within relationships. I developed an empirical analysis drawn from one interview with two sisters, and illustrated a repeating pattern in the interview talk where the younger sister takes up the subject positions and narrative capitals previously occupied by her elder sister, claiming those subject spaces for her own. I argued that while this relationship is a psychosocial one, there is no requirement

to understand this notion of the psychosocial in psychoanalytic terms. The meaning making on show here is achieved discursively through the take up of subject positions and mobilisations of narrative capitals.

A second contribution this thesis makes is a demonstration of an analytic style for a multilayered and productive discursive psychosocial psychology. This helps move forward the debate around the synthesis of a fine-grained analytic lens for order in talk with a wider lens for broader orders of grand narratives, ideological dilemmas and argumentative threads (Wetherell, 1998). The principles for this analytic focus were laid out by Wetherell, Billig and Edley, but with only a few exceptions (see Reynolds, 2004, for example) little empirical work has subsequently been worked up in a style that would be of this synthetic kind. My thesis works up an analytic approach which throughout is focused on the social action of talk, but which understands that social action to be operating at local levels and wider organisations of discursive order; often discourses of individualisation, neoliberalism and the psy complex; but other differently organised discourses too, such as discourses of the family and enduring relationships. This analytic contribution is delivered throughout the thesis, but chapters 5 and 6 provide the clearest illustrations upon which other chapters draw. In 5 and 6 I show how talk is embedded in multiple contexts, indexing multiple meanings, and how these may be held steady temporarily, but then shift in a dialogic tapestry of alternative readings.

A further contribution of the thesis is to debates on psychologisation and individualisation. Social psychology has joined little with these broad sociological debates and the sociological literatures here tend to be expressed in

monolithic terms, and not alive to the ideological dilemmas and conflicts lived out in practices in these discursive territories. Discursive and technological encouragements to being the neoliberal subject are deeply at odds with other profoundly powerful normative strictures, such as expectations of modesty and self-deprecation. Chapters 5 and 6 illustrated the way these grand discourses play out through contradictions, nuance, irony, unfixable argumentations, and not the simple rehearsing of neoliberal entrepreneurial discourse often presumed.

In chapter 6 for example I illustrated the way in which local practices of calling up discourses of particular psychologies, such as happiness, both draw on and re-enact grand narratives of psy complex discourses and the individual, experiencing, self. I showed how local orders of doing talk of choice are enmeshed in grand narratives of the neoliberal subject, one simultaneously produced in talk as both free *and* constrained; to have choice, but be impelled to make particular choice; to constantly risk dilemmas of good choice and bad choice.

The final main achievement of the thesis is the contribution to current theoretical debates on understanding the ‘psychosocial subject’. The analytic method I have demonstrated has also allowed me to say something in response to one of the central critiques from psychoanalytic psychosocial study, that discourse studies, with a focus on shared resources, fragmentation, and momentary productions, are unable to explain investments or commitments or take biography seriously. Because discursive work in psychology often concentrates on fine-grained analysis with attention on sequencing and interaction and practices, and sets aside the concept of an individual subject, it can create an impression that

there is a crucial gap left unattended and unexplained: this is the notion of the individual subject, with an analytic attention to life history and unconscious dynamics.

Psychoanalytically inflected psychosocial arguments have argued that the way to address this notion of personal biography and interiority lies with the notion of the dynamic unconscious as a private, inner world, organising understandings and behaviours.

However, in this thesis I have drawn on concepts from discursive approaches in psychology to show that discursively led psychosocial study does have rich analytic and theoretical resources for attending to life history, to personal investments, to personal *and* interpersonal orders. Again, this is hinted to throughout, for example in my analysis of the long extract from Paula in chapter 5 where I examine the making of biographical continuities through organising narratives joining pasts, presents and futures. The notion of personal order is worked up more explicitly in chapter 7 where I illustrated the way in which particular discourses have resonance for speakers across a range of interactional sites and become regular discursive tools for addressing interactional business. My example there considered Bridget, living out practices and technologies of the beauty industry, combining these with discourses of family, and work, and using them as resources to make sense of other women too. Patterns of usage work out over time as particular discursive resources and the argumentative dilemmas they index are reproduced for fresh sites and tasks. I also argued in chapter 7 that notions of imagining and fantasising about others could be seen to be a process embedded *in* discursive meaning making practices

and not require a theory of private, internal organisation to explain its appearance.

My method of pairing interviewees allowed me to go further though and in chapter 8 I explored relation dynamics in interpersonal relationships. Again, I have argued that we can use a discursive lens to understand something of the way these relationships are taken up in practices, without needing to delegate this territory of the personal and interpersonal to the psychoanalytic. I find quite plausible the argument Lucey (2009, in press) has made saying: ‘concepts such as identification, projection and projective identification ... allow for the possibility that what happens between people goes beyond conscious levels of awareness and conscious interest’. What I am not persuaded by is the argument that the location for these moments of identification and projection lies within the individual. I am adopting Billig’s (1999a; 2006) argument in this. These processes take place within external practices, within language, within the uptake of particular ideologies, within the playing out of ideological dilemmas, within the subject positions that get taken up and get contested, within the argumentative threads and discursive capitals speakers have access to. This is not because there is an internal unconscious, dynamic ego-executive which makes it so, but because there are habits of engagement in language use: a habit of calling up particular resources, repressing others, calling up more, repressing yet others. These are habits in negotiating routes through possibilities. Sometimes resources are received as well-matched to the interactional task, and sometimes received as ill-fitting and inadequate.

9.2. Reflections on the research and future directions

I decided early in the study to focus on women as a direct response to the relative neglect of women, and in particular, women in mid-life, in much social psychology. On balance I still think that was a good decision which kept the focus on women's discourses of self and other women rather than any perpetuation of women as 'other' to men. However, the absence of interviews with men does mean that my claims here cannot legitimately be claims to gendered patterns of behaviour and therefore this would be a valuable development in future study. Similarly, given my argument that much of what is on display here is intrinsically connected to contemporary individualisation and neoliberal policy, valuable additional research would come from a cross cultural, cross national approach.

The broad scope of the research was motivated by a desire to see what participants would construct as successful and failing given space to mobilise their own discursive selections, and to see what would pass as uncomplicatedly untroubled and what would require more careful management. This has been a particularly fruitful strategy for illustrating what gets marked out by speakers as passing and where dilemmas and tensions are made apparent.

I was aware during analysis that my first impressions of the interviews would be colouring the analyses I was working up. Consequently, I have been careful to point clearly to those moments in the talk that have helped form my conclusions, pointing not just to the immediate local interaction but to the broader discursive resources recruited across individual interviews and across the corpus as a whole. I have cited frequently and at length from the interviews, to allow

readers opportunity to think about the legitimacy of my arguments.

As the interviewer I found the emotional labour required of me in several of the interviews highly demanding as participants occasionally dealt with accounts which appeared to cause them distress. It seemed to me that despite my intention to allow participants to lead on topics, and to exercise care when working up co-constructions with them, my research agenda had placed them sometimes in discursively difficult positions. Notably, *all* participants expressed enjoyment of the interview process on its termination – usually in terms of opportunities to reflect. Indeed, my interviews sometimes appeared to offer an opportunity to celebrate achievements. Nevertheless, the ‘trouble’ I interpreted in some accounts did cause me to rethink my sampling strategy as I discussed in chapter 4. I elected *not* to seek out potential participants to fulfil demographic quotas on unemployment and poor housing because of concerns that these *a priori* criteria could also be targeting potential participants precisely because they might be expected to have more difficulty telling stories of successes and failures. Of course, they might not have struggled at all, but this was something I decided not to pursue. This points to potentially valuable future work sensitive to the discursive practices of speakers positioned in particular difficulty with discourses of ‘neoliberalism’ and ‘meritocracy’ and ‘entrepreneurship’.

One interview was particularly difficult: the paired interview between two sisters which I discussed in chapter 8. This interview was particularly charged for several reasons, I think. Early in the interview I began to interpret Olivia’s account as one which had to be worked up with much more effort if it was to generate a story of success in the face of her sister’s account, and indeed in the

presence of her sister. Both sisters actively contested much in each other's accounts. And, of course, there was the apparent disclosure of a suicide attempt. There was a discursive 'rough and tumble' about their interaction as the two sisters argued versions of events. This was something I found difficult to tolerate and it provoked some anxiety for me about my responsibility in bringing about this particular interview event. At several points in this interview I asked both women if they were happy to continue and they confirmed they were.

At the end of the interview both sisters accompanied me as I walked back to where I had left my car and, to my relief, there was much laughter in their conversation. Since then, examining their transcripts, I have noted occasions where both sisters would break off their 'argument' to check some apparently unrelated details with each other. For example, during one particularly heated debate Olivia interrupted her own flow to check whether her sister had remembered to cancel an appointment with her hairdresser. It is possible, perhaps likely, that their discursive rough and tumble may be a familiar, sisterly, habit of relating for them, and strange only for me. Possibly my anxiety reflects my own constructions of the way such talk with *my* siblings would, I think, have degenerated into highly charged and more lasting argument.

My analysis of my interview with the two sisters does suggest some potential for moving into therapeutic theories of the discursive constitutions of sibling relationships.

Also, I am aware that my notion of the discursive habits of engagement suggests potential for a fruitful dialogue with insights from Bourdieu's notion of the logic of practice and habitus. I suspect that debate may point to greater

flexibility and mobility in these discursive ‘habits’ than Bourdieu’s arguments might suggest, but this is another potentially productive debate for another time.

9.3. Closing remarks

I have argued that the understandings of success and failure are much more interactionally and contingently accomplished than previous study in psychology has allowed; that they are more varied, and more flexible. More importantly, I have argued that talk of success and failure is not talk of accomplishments or losses, but is an identity project in action. This is a morally organised and contested project, with orientations to evaluative consequence and troubled positions. In addition, I have taken up the notion of the neoliberal subject and explored empirically how this is activated in moment to moment interaction to constitute the individualised psychologised subject it presumes. I also note though, that speakers do not take on that habit of individualisation without contest; it is orientated to in some tension.


More than that; this thesis has developed and added to the debate between two versions of the psychosocial; a discursively led psychology, which focuses on the macro and micro fields of analysis; concerned with the social accomplishments of language in action; and a psychoanalytically inflected psychosocial psychology, calling on unconscious dynamics, inner worlds, and systematic hidden defences.

Discourse study in psychology is still a young project and the multilayered analytic approach demonstrated here is in relative infancy: but the resources upon which it draws make it a prodigious prospect. I have drawn on vital developments

in psychology from post-structuralist influences and the turn to language. The influence of conversation analysis has been enormously fruitful for understanding the moment to moment interactional business accomplishments in talk; but the drive to a discursive psychology which turns away from the broader ideological tapestries within which and by which these interactions are shaped misses much that is most productive for social psychology. The synthetic approach here, attentive to the rhetorical, the argumentative, to cultural technologies and grand narratives taken up in mundane practices, to shared social orders and personal and interpersonal orders, makes this a rewarding and entirely psychosocial prospect.

Appendices

Appendix A. Recruitment Poster



The Open University

Being Women

Would you be willing to take part in this research project which aims to learn more about how women think about success and failure in the context of everyday life?

These are the sorts of questions I will be asking:

What does it take for women to think of themselves as successful?

Do we worry about failing?

How do we work out what counts as successful, what matters most?

What are the failures that matter most?

Which ones don't matter at all?

What are the things that concern you?

*

I'd like to talk to women between 30 and 65 years old. Would you be interested in taking part?

Would you be willing to talk to me, Jean, about these questions, either or on your own, or with one or two other women you know, such as friends or family or work colleagues, etc. Talks will be confidential and you will not be identified by name in any of the work that comes out of this study. If you think you might like to take part please let me know and I will send you more information. If you have any questions, please do ask.

You can contact me in any of these ways:

Telephone: xxxxx xxxxx

e-mail: J.M.McAvoy@open.ac.uk

or in writing at The Open University (address below)

All our talks will take place somewhere convenient for you so please don't let that stop you getting involved. Your participation in the project would be very much appreciated. Thanks for reading this.

This study is being conducted as part of PhD research by Jean McAvoy, Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA. Tel: 01908 274066. Website: www.open.ac.uk

Appendix B. Information and consent letter

Dear

A study of women's personal stories of successes and failures

I am delighted you have expressed interest in taking part in this study. If you decide to go ahead, your involvement will make an important contribution to this project.

You will be asked to take part in one or two informal interviews discussing what you think about success and failure and what these things mean to you. You may be interviewed on your own, or with a friend or colleague of your choice if you prefer. The discussion is expected to last about one hour. The information you give will be used to explore how women talk about success and failure and the way we use these ideas to make judgements about ourselves and other people and the way we live our lives. Everything you say will be treated in confidence.

The discussion will be audio recorded and later transcribed for analysis. All names will be changed to protect the anonymity of all participants. Excerpts from the transcript will form part of the final research report as well as any academic papers which are published as a result of this project. The data will not be used for any purpose other than academic research and teaching. Your privacy will be protected and you will not be identified by name in any published work relating to this project. A transcript of your discussion group will be available for you if you would like your own copy.

This study is the basis for my PhD research being carried out at the Open University. My research is supervised by Prof. Margaret Wetherell and Prof. Ann Phoenix of the Faculty of Social Sciences at The Open University (address above). The project is funded by the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Open University.

If you decide to go ahead, please sign the form below to show that you have read the information in this consent letter. Participation in this study is voluntary and you should not feel under any pressure to join in. You are free to withdraw at any time and discontinue participation.

If you have any questions or concerns please do contact me either by telephone, or by e-mail, or in writing at the address above. If you have any concerns which you feel I cannot address you are very welcome to contact my supervisors for clarification.

I have provided two copies of this letter which I have already signed. If you would like to join in the project please sign and return one copy in the envelope

provided and I will contact you to arrange a convenient time for us to meet. The second copy of this letter is for you to keep to remind you what the study is about and to make sure you have all the necessary contact details if you have any questions.

Many thanks for considering participating in this study. Your time is much appreciated.

Best wishes

Jean McAvoy, MSc (PRM)

Participant: Name (Please print)_____

Signature_____

Researcher: Name _____

Signature _____

Appendix C. Demographic summaries

Pseudo-nym	Age	Marital status	Children	Employment	Interview no.	Interview location	Interview length in minutes	Interviewed alone unless stated
Amy	34	Second marriage	1	Part-time financial advisor	7	home	82:39	
Andrea	35	Single	0	Charity worker	17	home	62:03	
Barbara	44	First marriage	2	IT trainer	6	work	64:32	with Cheryl (work colleague)
Bridget	41	First marriage	3	Joint owner of a beauty salon	4	work	34:57	
Cathy	50	First marriage	3	Health services training manager	3	work	90:29	
Cheryl	52	First marriage	1	Administration clerk	6	work	64:32	with Barbara (work colleague)
Dot	49	First marriage	3	NHS clerk, previously employed in family business	10	home	64:32 ¹⁶	
Gail	46	First marriage	3	University lecturer	16	work	113:11	
Hannah	51	Divorced	2	Voluntary sector worker	13	home	106:19	
Jackie	55	First marriage	2	Methodist minister	19	home	116:01	
Linda	39	Second marriage	2	Care home manager	8	home	112:36	
Louisa	49	Single	0	Social worker	2	work	62:41	

¹⁶ Remarkably, the same length as with Barbara and Cheryl

Maria	50	Second marriage	2	Teacher	12	home	62:34	
Mel	46	First marriage	2	Voluntary sector care services manager in.	18	home	67:37	
Nora	58	Widow (second marriage)	2	Voluntary sector worker, previously self-employed	20	work	48:02	
Olivia	37	Divorced	0	Credit manager, banking	11	sister's home	150:53	with Yvonne (sister)
Paula	45	First marriage	2	Housewife	9	home	124:46	
Rachel	52	Divorced	2	University lecturer	5	friend's home	73:34	with Tess (friend and work colleague)
Ruth	59	First marriage	1	Retired nurse	1	home	104:40	with Sue (friend)
Sally	34	First marriage	2	Shop worker	14	home	124:45	
Sheila	59	First marriage	3	Social care trainer	15	home	78:03	
Sue	55	First marriage	2	Retired further education teacher and nurse	1	friend's home	104:40	with Ruth (friend)
Tess	45	Divorced	2	University lecturer	5	home	73:34	with Rachel (friend and work colleague)
Yvonne	33	First marriage	3	Bank manager	11	home	150:53	with Olivia (sister)

Appendix D. Question schedule

GENERAL		
1	<p><i>What do the concepts success and failure mean to you?</i></p> <p>If you think of women our age, either you personally or public figures, what do you think of as success or failing?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is it that makes that seem successful? • Does that relate to your own life? Have you experienced that sort of thing? • We talked about success; what about failure. • What is it that makes that stand out as failure? • Is that something that you have had to deal with in your own life?
TOPICS AND SITES		
2	<p><i>Work/career</i></p> <p>Is (paid) work important to you as an achievement, as a way of measuring your own success?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would you say has been particularly successful or even particularly unsuccessful for you in regard to work
3	<p><i>Money</i></p> <p>Do money and material possessions count for you as a form of success?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What level of money or possessions counts as successful; is that a level you have achieved?
4	<p><i>Relationships</i></p> <p>Are relationships important as a measure of your personal success for you? Things like having a partner, or a husband, having children, being a particular sort of mother, or wife, or daughter, and so on.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you give me an example of what you mean?

5	<p><i>Appearance</i></p> <p>I'm interested in how we judge ourselves, and indeed others, in terms of our appearance. Some people say that there is pressure to look good, to fight signs of ageing, etc. What's your experience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you feel a pressure yourselves to look a certain way. • Is that affected by ageing?
6	<p><i>Being good enough... Some women...</i></p> <p>Taking all of these things into account, work, relationships, ageing, some women say there are environments where they never quite feel good enough. Is that something you ever find yourself thinking?</p>	
7	<p><i>Class</i></p> <p>Do you think social class affects whether people are judged to be successful or not?</p> <p>What class would you say you were in?</p> <p>Are you in the same class now as when you were younger or has that changed in any way?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it straightforward for you to say what class you are in? • Do you think class affects the sorts of things you can do? • Is that something you have experienced
PHOTOGRAPHS		
8	<p>Can you look at these pictures of different women. Some are well known, some are ordinary everyday sort of people. It is just a diverse collection of all sorts of different people. I'm interested in what you think about them in terms of success and failure and the way women live?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any images here that you relate to personally? • Are there any images here that you aspire to? • Who are the successful ones

ACROSS TIME		
9	<p><i>Life span</i></p> <p>Have your ideas about success and failure changed over the years?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think <u>you</u> have changed, or • Do you think <u>times</u> have changed and it's different for everyone?
10	<p><i>Changes you might make</i></p> <p>Are there things you wish you had done differently;</p> <p>And are there things you hope to do differently in the future?</p>	

Appendix E(1). Photographic images used during the interviews

Photographic images were presented on laminated card. Some cards contained single images, some multiple images. That format is reproduced in the pages that follow. The front of the card showed the images only, without any text. The reverse of the card held a short caption to identify or describe the picture, followed by the photo credit. On the following pages, the captions are included below each sheet of images for ease of reference.

Note: no figure numbers were used on the original presentation cards. Cards were presented in no particular order, and the order differed for each participant. Participants were encouraged to spread the cards out, look through them, and select the ones they found interesting and ones where they felt they had something to say. Most participants worked fairly systematically through the whole collection, often gathering images into temporary groupings on shifting themes.

Full photo credits follow at the end (see page 385).

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to make available online

(Photo: Chris Jackson/Getty Images)

Plate 1. Joanna Lumley, actress, 2005

<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Maeers/Fox Photos/Getty Images)</p>	<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: George Freston/Fox Photos/Getty Images)</p>
<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Mike Lawn/Evening Standard/Getty Images)</p>	<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Evening Standard/Getty Images)</p>

Plate 2a. Planting potatoes, 1957

Plate 2b. Textile factory

Plate 2c. Emptying the washing machine in a laundrette

Plate 2d. A Soho prostitute waits for custom

<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Evening Standard/Getty Images)</p>	<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Photodisc Collection/Getty Images)</p>
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Plate 3a. A woman pours tea for her family

Plate 3b. A woman looks at a website on a kitchen laptop, 2002

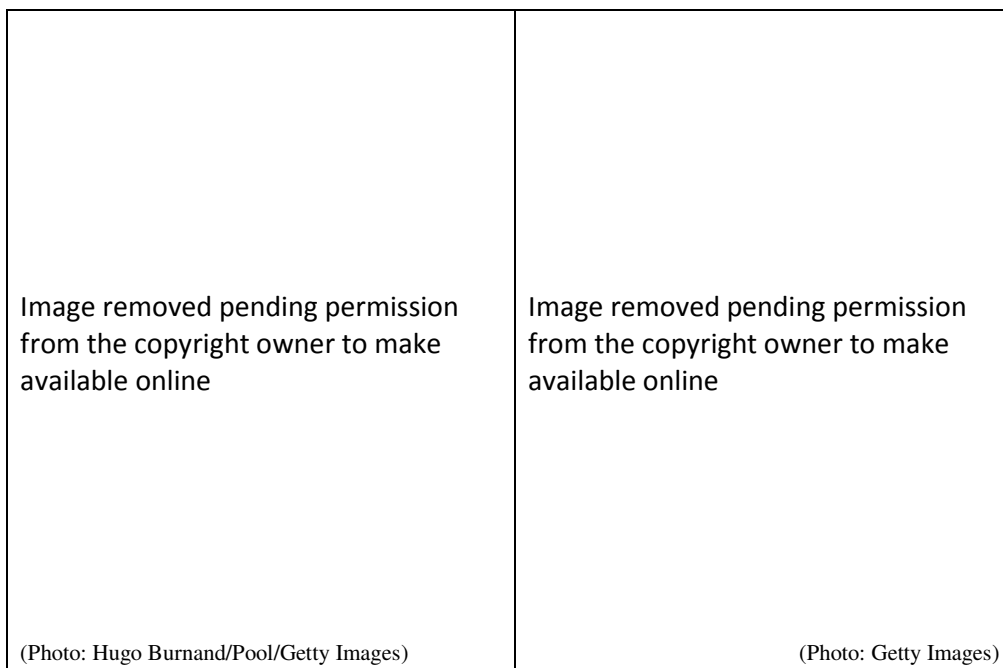


Plate 4a. Charles, Prince of Wales and Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall

Plate 4b. Charles, Prince of Wales, and Diana, Princess of Wales

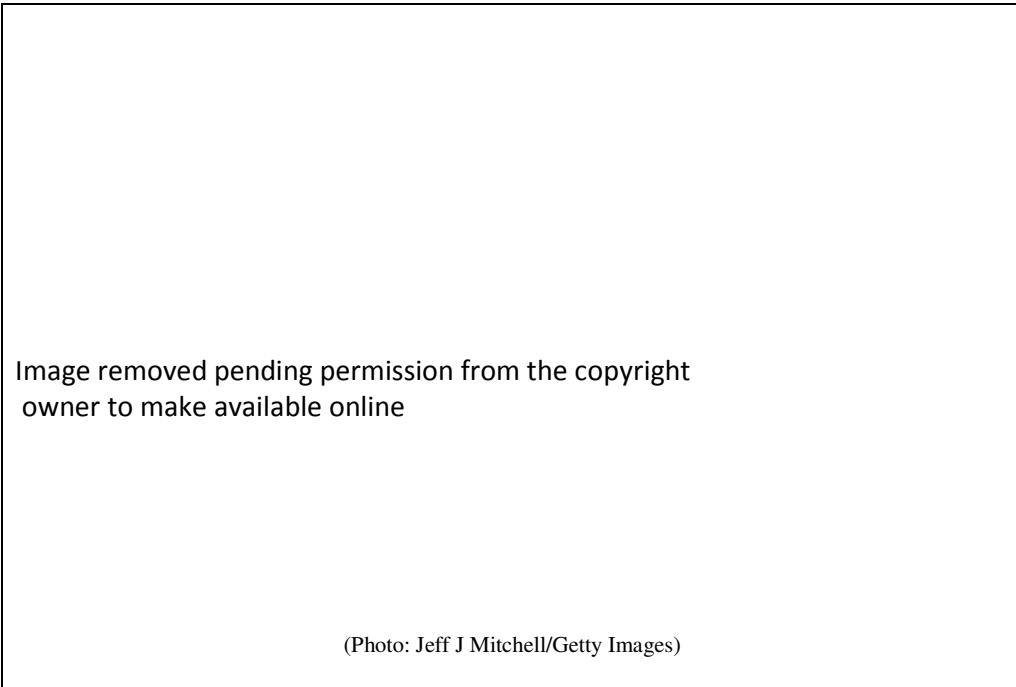


Plate 5. JK Rowling, the creator of Harry Potter, receiving an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Aberdeen, 6 July, 2006



(Photo: Werner Kissling. ©University of Edinburgh – Dept of Celtic and Scottish Studies. Licensors www.scran.ac.uk)

Plate 6. Miss Kate Maclean of Garrynamonie, South Uist, 1947.
Miss Maclean was renowned for her expertise in dyeing wool.

<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Gary M Prior/Allsport/Getty Images)</p>	<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Kirsty Wigglesworth/ROTA/Getty Images)</p>
<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Clive Rose/Getty Images)</p>	

Plate 7a. Denise Lewis prepares to toss the shot during the heptathlon at the 1996 Olympic Games

Plate 7b. Rhona Martin and the Great Britain curling team, Winter Olympic Games, 2006

Plate 7c. Double Olympic gold medallist, Dame Kelly Holmes, Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire

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(Photo: Tim Boyle/Getty Images)

Plate 8. Suzette D’Hooghe, 1977, learning computing

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(Photo: Ross Kinnaird/Allsport/Getty Images)

Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online

(© UPI/Image Collection)

Plate 9a. The Arsenal ladies, winners of the FA Women's Premier League Final, 1999

Plate 9b. Laila Ali (daughter of Muhommad Ali) against Valerie Mahfood, Las Vegas, 2002

<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(© Motion Picture & Television Photo Archive/ Image Collection)</p>	<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(© Bob Willoughby/Motion Picture & Television Photo Archive/Image Collection)</p>
<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(© 1978 Bob Willoughby/Motion Picture & Television Photo Archive/Image Collection/)</p>	<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(© 1990 Gunther/Motion Picture & Television Photo Archive/Image Collection)</p>

Plate 10a. Elizabeth Taylor, Nicky Hilton, Rosalind Russell, Frederick Brisson at Elizabeth Taylor and Nicky Hilton's wedding, 1951

Plate 10c. Elizabeth Taylor with Eddie Fisher at their private wedding reception in Las Vegas, 1959.

Plate 10b. Liza (daughter), Elizabeth Taylor, Michael Wilding Jr., Richard Burton, Chris Wilding, and Kate Burton. C. 1965

Plate 10d. Elizabeth Taylor and Larry Fortensky, 1990

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(Photo: Fox Photos/Getty Images)

Plate 11. 'Fruit Face', 1939

<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Dave Hogan/Getty Images)</p>	<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Paula Bronstein/Newsmakers/Getty Images)</p>
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Plate 12a. Cherie Booth, wife of Prime Minister Tony Blair, 2005

Plate 12b. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, wife of President Bill Clinton, and daughter Chelsea, visiting Yen Tang, Hanoi

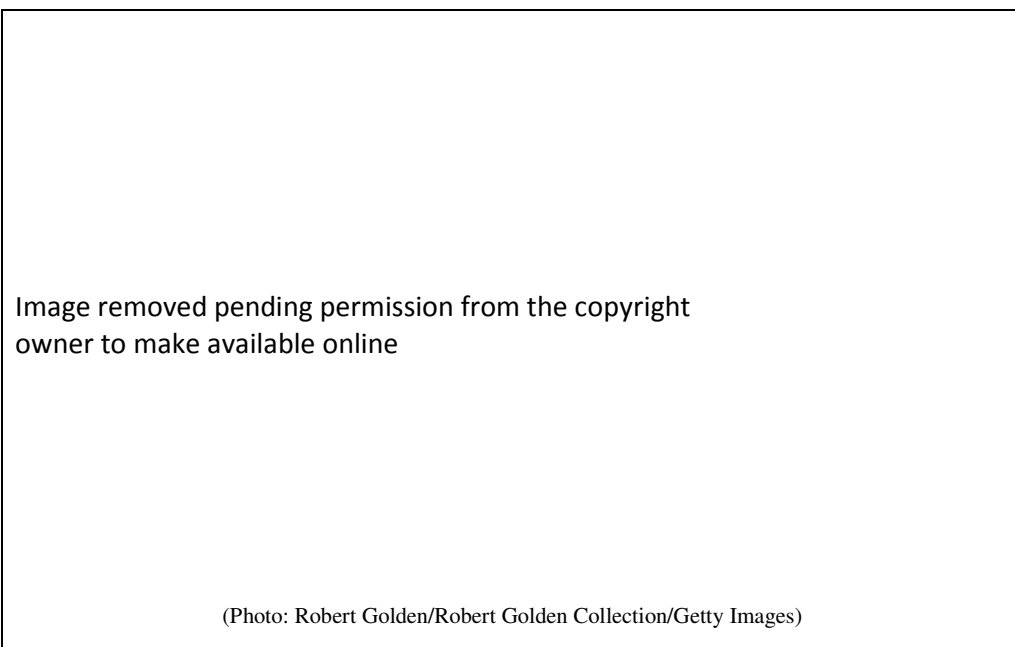


Plate 13. Hospital Auxiliary, c. 1975

Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online

(Photo: John Li/Getty Images)

Plate 14. Nigella Lawson, cookery author and presenter, 2003

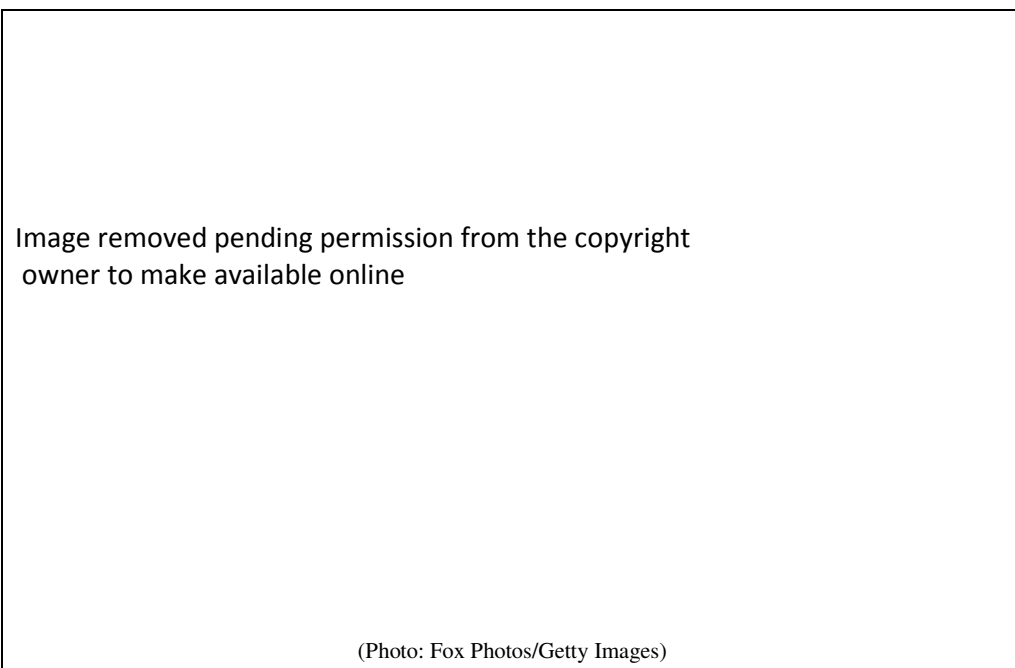


Plate 15. The 'best ankle' competition, June 1936

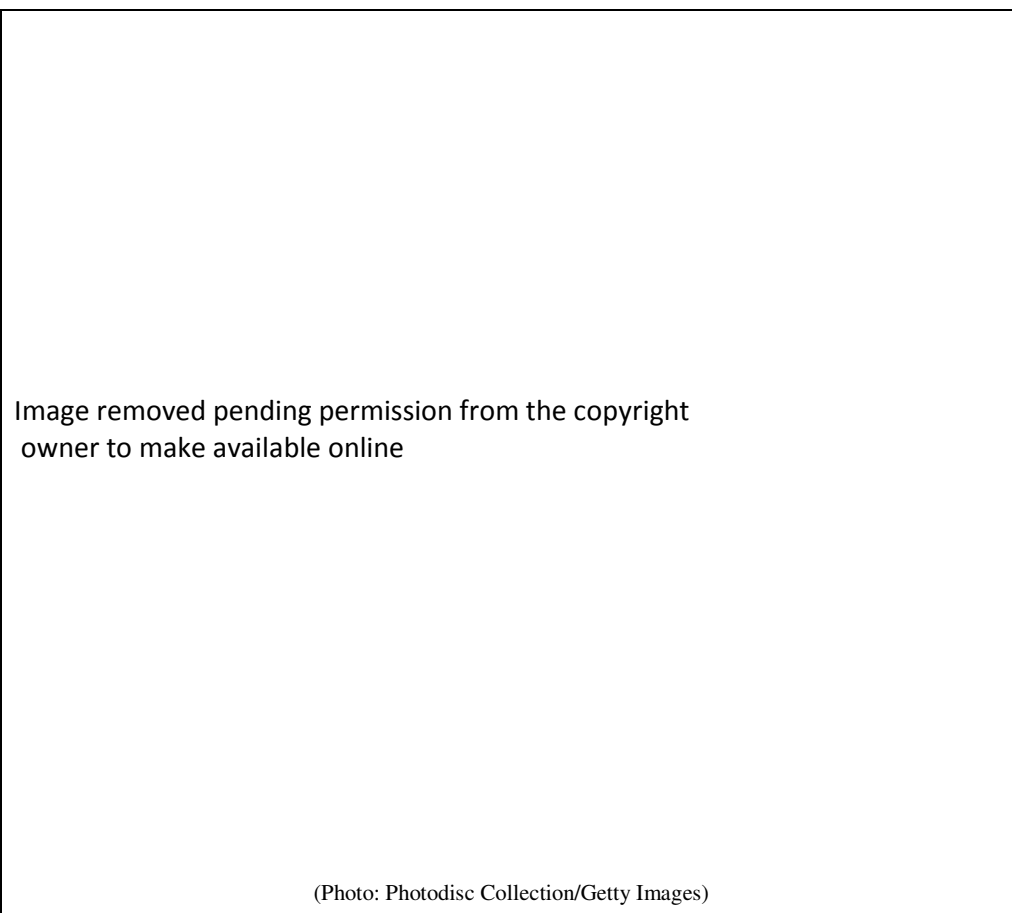


Plate 16. Cucumbers and mask

<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Dave Hogan/Getty Images)</p>	<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Laura Cavanaugh ©UPI/Image Collection)</p>
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Plate 17a. Duchess of York (left) and Victoria Beckham, 1999

Plate 17b. Naomi Campbell (left) and Victoria Beckham 2003

Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online

(Photo: Express/Getty Images)

Plate 18. Mother and Baby

<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: UPI/David Silpa ©UPI /Image Collection)</p>	<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Frank Barratt David Ashdown/Keystone/Getty Images)</p>
<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Kenneth Denyer/Daily Express/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)</p>	<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Tim Boyle/Newsmakers/Getty Images)</p>

Plate 19a. Madonna at the Live 8 Concert, 2005, performing with Birham Woldu who survived the Ethiopian famine of 1984.

Plate 19b. Margaret Thatcher, 1977

Plate 19c. Diana Dors, English film star. 1958

Plate 19d. Irish author Maeve Binchy, 2001

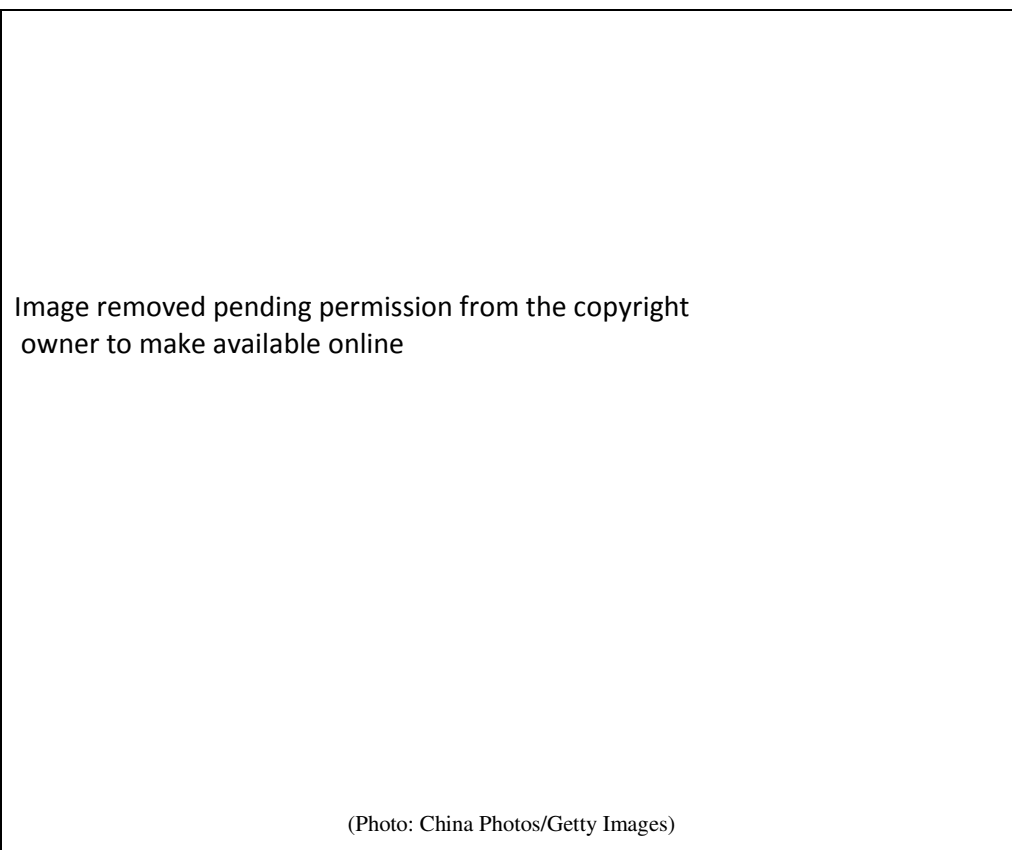


Plate 20. Miss World, Unnur Birna Vilhjalmsdottir of Iceland,
2005

<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Pictorial Parade/Getty Images)</p>	<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Crown Copyright 2006)</p>
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Plate 21a. Audrey Hepburn, actress (1929-1993)

Plate 21b. Baroness Amos, the first black woman cabinet minister, joint first black woman peer and the third female leader of the House of Lords

<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Peter Keegan/Keystone/Getty Images)</p>	<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Evening Standard/Getty Images)</p>
<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Evening Standard/Getty Images)</p>	<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Keystone/Getty Images)</p>

Plate 22a. Pro-Choice March, 1977: Safe legal abortions for all women.

Plate 22b. Women protesting against the lack of safe facilities for ‘battered wives’, 1975

Plate 22c. Wives of striking Derbyshire miners, 1972

Plate 22d. 1982: Protesting against the distinction made by the judge and the media between prostitutes and ‘respectable women’ during the Yorkshire Ripper case

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(Photo: Scott Barbour/Getty Images)

Plate 23. Marble sculpture of Alison Lapper,
by Marc Quinn, 2005

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(Photo: Amos Morgan/Getty Images)

Plate 24 [No caption]

Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online

(Photo: Monica Lau/Getty Images)

Plate 25. Make-up and tattoos



Plate 26. Mother and daughter

<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Nancy R. Cohen/Getty Images)</p>	<p>Image removed pending permission from the copyright owner to make available online</p> <p>(Photo: Oleg Nikishin/Newsmakers/Getty Images)</p>
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Plate 27a. Gardens...

Plate 27b.... and markets
Selling flowers for International
Women's day, Russia, 2001



Plate 28. The cat or the lion

Appendix E(2). Photo credits

Plate 1. Joanna Lumley, actress, 2005. Original Title: Sea Princess. Photo by Chris Jackson/Getty Images.

Plate 2a. Planting potatoes, 1957. Original Title: Planting Potatoes. Photo: Maeers/ Fox Photos/Getty Images.

Plate 2b. Textile factory. Original Title: Textile Factory. 1968. Photo: George Freston/Fox Photos/Getty Images.

Plate 2c. Emptying the washing machine in a laundrette. Original Title: Barbican Laundrette. 1979. Photo: Mike Lawn/Evening Standard /Getty Images.

Plate 2d. A Soho prostitute waits for custom. Original Title: Lady Of The Night. 1978. Photo: Evening Standard/Getty Images.

Plate 3a. A woman pours tea for her family. Original Title: A Cup Of Tea. 1969. Photo: Evening Standard /Getty Images.

Plate 3b. A woman looks at a website on a kitchen laptop, 2002. Original Title: Woman Looking at Website on Laptop in Kitchen. 2002. Photo: Photodisc Collection/Getty Images.

Plate 4a. Charles, Prince of Wales and Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall. [No title.] 2005. Photo: Hugo Burnand/Pool/Getty Images.

Plate 4b. Charles, Prince of Wales, and Diana, Princess of Wales. Original Title: Regal Newlyweds. 1981. Getty Images.

Plate 5. JK Rowling, the creator of Harry Potter, receiving an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Aberdeen, 6 July, 2006. Original Title: JK Rowling - Honorary Degree Presentation. 2006. Photo: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images.

Plate 6. Miss Kate Maclean of Garrynamonie, South Uist, 1947. Miss Maclean was renowned for her expertise in dyeing wool. Original Title: Miss Kate Maclean of Garrynamonie, South Uist. Photo: Werner Kissling © University of Edinburgh - Dept of Celtic and Scottish Studies. Licensor www.scran.ac.uk. Reference: 000-000-616-880-R

Plate 7a. Denise Lewis prepares to toss the shot during the heptathlon at the 1996 Olympic Games. Original Title: Denise Lewis of Great Britain prepares for her toss of the shot-put. 1996. Photo: Gary M. Prior/Allsport/Getty Images.

Plate 7b. Rhona Martin and the Great Britain curling team, Winter Olympic Games, 2006. Original Title: Curling - Switzerland v Great Britain. 2006. Photo by Clive Rose/Getty Images.

Plate 7c. Double Olympic golf medallist Dame Kelly Holmes, Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire. [No original title] 2005. Photo: Kirsty Wigglesworth/ROTA/Getty Images.

Plate 8. Suzette D'Hooghe, 1977, learning computing. Original Title: Senior Citizens Learn Computer Skills. 2003. Photo: Tim Boyle/Getty Images.

Plate 9a. The Arsenal ladies, winners of the FA Women's Premier League Final, 1999. Original Title: Arsenal ladies. 1999. Photo: Ross Kinnaird/Allsport/Getty Images.

Plate 9b. Laila Ali (daughter of Muhammad Ali) against Valerie Mahfood, Las Vegas, 2002. © UPI/Image Collection (EBSCO). LVP2002110804

Plate 10a. Elizabeth Taylor, Nicky Hilton, Rosalind Russell, Frederick Brisson at Elizabeth Taylor and Nicky Hilton's wedding, 1951. © Motion Picture & Television Photo Archive/Image Collection (EBSCO).

Plate 10b. Liza (daughter), Elizabeth Taylor, Michael Wilding Jr., Richard Burton, Chris Wilding, and Kate Burton. C. 1965. © Bob Willoughby/Motion Picture & Television Photo Archive/Image Collection (EBSCO).

Plate 10c. Elizabeth Taylor with Eddie Fisher at their private wedding reception in Las Vegas, 1959. © 1978 Bob Willoughby/Motion Picture & Television Photo Archive/Image Collection (EBSCO).

Plate 10d. Elizabeth Taylor and Larry Fortensky, 1990. © 1990 Gunther/Motion Picture & Television Photo Archive/Image Collection. (EBSCO).

Plate 11. 'Fruit Face', 1939. Original Title: Fruit Face. 1939. Photo: Fox Photos/Getty Images.

Plate 12a. Cherie Booth, wife of Prime Minister Tony Blair, 2005. Original Title: Cherie Booth - Documentary Filming. 2005. Photo: Dave Hogan/Getty Images.

Plate 12b. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, wife of President Bill Clinton, and daughter Chelsea, visiting Yen Tang, Hanoi. Original Title: Clinton Family Historic Visit to Vietnam. 2000. Photo: Paula Bronstein/Newsmakers/Getty Images.

Plate 13. Hospital Auxiliary, c. 1975. Original Title: Hospital Auxiliary. circa 1975. Photo: Robert Golden/Robert Golden Collection/Getty Images.

Plate 14. Nigella Lawson, cookery author and presenter, 2003. Original Title: The Saatchi Gallery Opening Party. 2003. Photo by John Li/Getty Images.

Plate 15. The ‘best ankle’ competition, June 1936. Original Title: Ankle Competition. 1936. Photo: Fox Photos /Getty Images.

Plate 16. Cucumbers and mask. Original Title: Woman with mask and cucumbers on eyes. 2000. Photo: Photodisc Collection/Getty Images..

Plate 17a. Duchess of York (left) and Victoria Beckham, 1999. Original Title: The Duchess of York and Victoria Beckham backstage at Earls Court . 1999. Photo by Dave Hogan/Getty Images.

Plate 17b. Naomi Campbell (left) and Victoria Beckham 2003. Naomi Campbell (left) and Victoria Beckham pose for pictures at the Costume Institute’s Spring 2003 ‘Goddess’ exhibition and Gala at the Metropolitan Museum New York, 2003. Photo: Laura Cavanaugh ©UPI. Image Collection (EBSCO). NYP2003042853

Plate 18. Mother and Baby. Original Title: Mother And Baby. circa 1968. Photo: Express/Getty Images.

Plate 19a. Madonna at the Live 8 Concert, 2005, performing with Birham Woldu who survived the Ethiopian famine of 1984. ©UPI. Photo: UPI/David Silpa/Image Collection (EBSCO).

Plate 19b. Margaret Thatcher, 1977. Original Title: Margaret Thatcher. 1977. Photo: Frank Barratt David Ashdown/Keystone /Getty Images.

Plate 19c. Diana Dors, English film star, 1958. Original Title: Diana Dors. 1958. Photo: Kenneth Denyer/Daily Express/Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

Plate 19d. Irish author Maeve Binchy, 2001. Original Title: Irish author Maeve Binchy in Chicago. 2001. Photo: Tim Boyle/Newsmakers/Getty Images.

Plate 20. Miss World, Unnur Birna Vilhjalmsdottir of Iceland, 2005. Original Title: Miss World 2005 Finals. 2005. Photo by China Photos/Getty Images.

Plate 21a. Audrey Hepburn, actress (1929-1993). Original Title: Portrait Of Audrey Hepburn. 1960. Photo by Pictorial Parade/Getty Images.

Plate 21b. Baroness Amos, the first black woman cabinet minister, joint first black woman peer and the third female leader of the House of Lords. Crown Copyright 2006¹⁷

Plate 22a. Pro-Choice March, 1977: Safe legal abortions for all women. Original Title: Pro-Choice March. 1977. Photo: Peter Keegan/Keystone /Getty Images.

¹⁷ Crown Copyright 2006. Website statement said free use for research, education, and internally for other purposes. 2007 says: The material may be downloaded to file or printer without requiring specific prior permission. Any other proposed use of the material is subject to the approval of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO).

Plate 22b. Women protesting against the lack of safe facilities for 'battered wives', 1975. Original Title: Refuge Needed. 1975 Photo: Evening Standard/Getty Images.

Plate 22c. Wives of striking Derbyshire miners, 1972. Original Title: Miners Wives. 1972. Photo: Evening Standard/Getty Images.

Plate 22d. 1982: Protesting against the distinction made by the judge and the media between prostitutes and 'respectable women' during the Yorkshire Ripper case. Original Title: Prostitutes' dignity. 1982. Photo: Keystone/Getty Images.

Plate 23. Marble sculpture of Alison Lapper, by Marc Quinn, 2005. Original Title: Controversial Statue Unveiled In Trafalgar Square. 2005. Photo by Scott Barbour/ Getty Images.

Plate 24 [No caption]. Original Title: Mature woman wearing glasses, portrait. 2001. Photo: Amos Morgan /Getty Images.

Plate 25. Make-up and tattoos. Original Title: Tattooed Woman Applying Makeup. 2000. Photo: Monica Lau /Getty Images.

Plate 26. Mother and daughter. Original Title: Mother and daughter (3-5) using computer, smiling. 2005. Photo: SW Productions/Getty Images.

Plate 27a. Gardens... Original Title: Woman Gardening. 1999. Photo: Nancy R. Cohen/Getty Images.

Plate 27b.... and markets. Selling flowers for International Women's day, Russia, 2001. Original Title: Russians Celebrate International Women's Day. 2001. Photo: Oleg Nikishin/Newsmakers/Getty Images.

Plate 28. The cat or the lion. <http://www.paloaltolions.org/Tails/TailsText.html>

Appendix F. Transcription notation

Transcription notation used throughout this thesis is an adaptation of Jeffersonian notation (see Atkinson and Heritage, 1984, cited in Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998). Notation devices were selected in place of conventional punctuation in order to direct the reader and analyst away from a conventional reading and towards a more deliberate analysis, but without obscuring readability. Conventional spelling is used on the assumption that for this study regional accents had no particular interpretative meaning and orthographic representation aids readability.

[02:33/67:37]	each extract begins with a time indicator in square brackets. The numbers before the dividing line / indicate the point in the recording where the extract starts; the numbers after the diagonal line indicate the total length of the recording. In this example, the extract begins 2 minutes and 33 seconds into a recording which lasts for 67 minutes and 37 seconds.
<u>word</u>	words or part words underlined indicates speaker's emphasis
(word)	words in single brackets indicates the researcher's guess when the sound is unclear
((note))	italic text inside double brackets is a researcher's note, for example, non-verbal activity, such as ((<i>laughter</i>)) or directing the reader to figure numbers for the photo images referred to in talk
(.)	a full stop inside brackets indicates a pause
[[opening square brackets aligned over two rows indicates overlapping talk
wor::d	a double colon indicates the preceding sound is drawn out
↑	an upwards arrow indicates a rising intonation
°word°	degree symbols around a word or section of talk indicates noticeably quieter speech
word-	a dash at the end of a word or part word indicates a sharp cut off
.hh	a full stop before two letter aitches indicates an audible in-breath
hh	two letter aitches indicate an audible out-breath
[...]	ellipsis in square brackets indicates a section of the discussion has been omitted, with accompanying text indicates the duration of the talk omitted, for example, [2 minutes 20 seconds omitted]

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